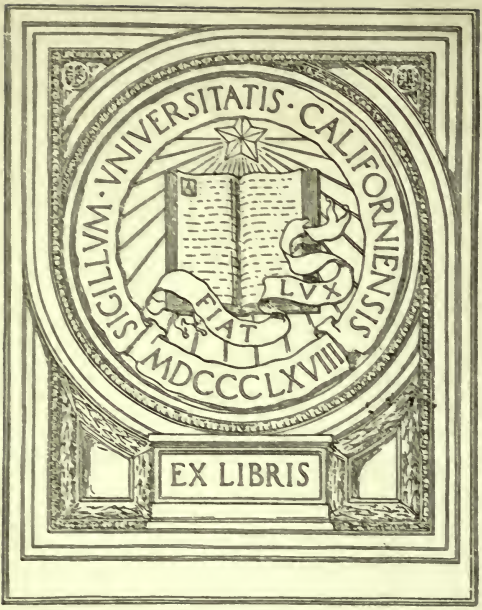
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THE BOSTONIANS

A NOVEL

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BY

HENRY JAMES

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
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XXIV

A LITTLE more than an hour after this he stood in the parlour of Doctor Tarrant's suburban residence, in Monadnoc Place. He had induced a juvenile maid-servant, by an appeal somewhat impassioned, to let the ladies know that he was there; and she had returned, after a long absence, to say that Miss Tarrant would come down to him in a little while. He possessed himself, according to his wont, of the nearest book (it lay on the table, with an old magazine and a little japanned tray containing Tarrant's professional cards—his denomination as a mesmeric healer), and spent ten minutes in turning it over. It was a biography of Mrs. Ada T. P. Foat, the celebrated trance-lecturer, and was embellished by a portrait representing the lady with a surprised expression and innumerable ringlets. Ransom said to himself, after reading a few pages, that much ridicule had been cast upon Southern literature; but if that was a fair specimen of Northern!—and he threw it back upon the table with a gesture almost as contemptuous as if he had not known perfectly, after so long a residence in the North, that it was not, while he wondered whether this was the sort of thing Miss Tarrant had been brought up on. There was no other book to be seen, and he remembered to have read the magazine; so there was finally nothing for him, as the occupants of the house

failed still to appear, but to stare before him, into the bright, bare, common little room, which was so hot that he wished to open a window, and of which an ugly, undraped cross-light seemed to have taken upon itself to reveal the poverty. Ransom, as I have mentioned, had not a high standard of comfort, and noticed little, usually, how people's houses were furnished—it was only when they were very pretty that he observed; but what he saw while he waited at Doctor Tarrant's made him say to himself that it was no wonder Verena liked better to live with Olive Chancellor. He even began to wonder whether it were for the sake of that superior softness she had cultivated Miss Chancellor's favour, and whether Mrs. Luna had been right about her being mercenary and insincere. So many minutes elapsed before she appeared that he had time to remember he really knew nothing to the contrary, as well as to consider the oddity (so great when one did consider it) of his coming out to Cambridge to see her, when he had only a few hours in Boston to spare, a year and a half after she had given him her very casual invitation. She had not refused to receive him, at any rate; she was free to, if it didn't please her. And not only this, but she was apparently making herself fine in his honour, inasmuch as he heard a rapid footstep move to and fro above his head, and even, through the slightness which in Monadnoc Place did service for an upper floor, the sound of drawers and presses opened and closed. Some one was "flying round," as they said in Mississippi. At last the stairs creaked under a light tread, and the next moment a brilliant person came into the room.

His reminiscence of her had been very pretty; but now that she had developed and matured, the little prophetess was prettier still. Her splendid hair seemed to shine; her cheek and chin had a curve

which struck him by its fineness ; her eyes and lips were full of smiles and greetings. She had appeared to him before as a creature of brightness, but now she lighted up the place, she irradiated, she made everything that surrounded her of no consequence ; dropping upon the shabby sofa with an effect as charming as if she had been a nymph sinking on a leopard-skin, and with the native sweetness of her voice forcing him to listen till she spoke again. It was not long before he perceived that this added lustre was simply success ; she was young and tender still, but the sound of a great applauding audience had been in her ears ; it formed an element in which she felt buoyant and floated. Still, however, her glance was as pure as it was direct, and that fantastic fairness hung about her which had made an impression on him of old, and which reminded him of unworldly places—he didn't know where—convent-cloisters or vales of Arcady. At that other time she had been parti-coloured and bedizened, and she had always an air of costume, only now her costume was richer and more chastened. It was her line, her condition, part of her expression. If at Miss Birdseye's, and afterwards in Charles Street, she might have been a rope-dancer, to-day she made a "scene" of the mean little room in Monadnoc Place, such a scene as a prima donna makes of daubed canvas and dusty boards. She addressed Basil Ransom as if she had seen him the other week and his merits were fresh to her, though she let him, while she sat smiling at him, explain in his own rather ceremonious way why it was he had presumed to call upon her on so slight an acquaintance—on an invitation which she herself had had more than time to forget. His explanation, as a finished and satisfactory thing, quite broke down ; there was no more impressive reason than that he had simply wished to see her. He became aware that

this motive loomed large, and that her listening smile, innocent as it was, in the Arcadian manner, of mockery, seemed to accuse him of not having the courage of his inclination. He had alluded especially to their meeting at Miss Chancellor's ; there it was that she had told him she should be glad to see him in her home.

" Oh yes, I remember perfectly, and I remember quite as well seeing you at Miss Birdseye's the night before. I made a speech—don't you remember ? That was delightful."

" It was delightful indeed," said Basil Ransom.

" I don't mean my speech ; I mean the whole thing. It was then I made Miss Chancellor's acquaintance. I don't know whether you know how we work together. She has done so much for me."

" Do you still make speeches ? " Ransom asked, conscious, as soon as he had uttered it, that the question was below the mark.

" Still ? Why, I should hope so ; it's all I'm good for ! It's my life—or it's going to be. And it's Miss Chancellor's too. We are determined to do something."

" And does she make speeches too ? "

" Well, she makes mine—or the best part of them. She tells me what to say—the real things, the strong things. It's Miss Chancellor as much as me ! " said the singular girl, with a generous complacency which was yet half ludicrous.

" I should like to hear you again," Basil Ransom rejoined.

" Well, you must come some night. You will have plenty of chances. We are going on from triumph to triumph."

Her brightness, her self-possession, her air of being a public character, her mixture of the girlish and the comprehensive, startled and confounded her visitor, who felt that if he had come to gratify his curiosity

he should be in danger of going away still more curious than satiated. She added in her gay, friendly, trustful tone—the tone of facile intercourse, the tone in which happy, flower-crowned maidens may have talked to sunburnt young men in the golden age—"I am very familiar with your name; Miss Chancellor has told me all about you."

"All about me?" Ransom raised his black eyebrows. "How could she do that? She doesn't know anything about me!"

"Well, she told me you are a great enemy to our movement. Isn't that true? I think you expressed some unfavourable idea that day I met you at her house."

"If you regard me as an enemy, it's very kind of you to receive me."

"Oh, a great many gentlemen call," Verena said, calmly and brightly. "Some call simply to inquire. Some call because they have heard of me, or been present on some occasion when I have moved them. Every one is so interested."

"And you have been in Europe," Ransom remarked, in a moment.

"Oh yes, we went over to see if they were in advance. We had a magnificent time—we saw all the leaders."

"The leaders?" Ransom repeated.

"Of the emancipation of our sex. There are gentlemen there, as well as ladies. Olive had splendid introductions in all countries, and we conversed with all the earnest people. We heard much that was suggestive. And as for Europe!"—and the young lady paused, smiling at him and ending in a happy sigh, as if there were more to say on the subject than she could attempt on such short notice.

"I suppose it's very attractive," said Ransom encouragingly.

"It's just a dream!"

"And did you find that they were in advance?"

"Well, Miss Chancellor thought they were. She was surprised at some things we observed, and concluded that perhaps she hadn't done the Europeans justice—she has got such an open mind, it's as wide as the sea!—while I incline to the opinion that on the whole *we* make the better show. The state of the movement there reflects their general culture, and their general culture is higher than ours (I mean taking the term in its broadest sense). On the other hand, the *special* condition—moral, social, personal—of our sex seems to me to be superior in this country; I mean regarded in relation—in proportion as it were—to the social phase at large. I must add that we did see some noble specimens over there. In England we met some lovely women, highly cultivated, and of immense organising power. In France we saw some wonderful, contagious types; we passed a delightful evening with the celebrated Marie Verneuil; she was released from prison, you know, only a few weeks before. Our total impression was that it is only a question of time—the future is ours. But everywhere we heard one cry—'How long, O Lord, how long?'"

Basil Ransom listened to this considerable statement with a feeling which, as the current of Miss Tarrant's facile utterance flowed on, took the form of an hilarity charmed into stillness by the fear of losing something. There was indeed a sweet comicality in seeing this pretty girl sit there and, in answer to a casual, civil inquiry, drop into oratory as a natural thing. Had she forgotten where she was, and did she take him for a full house? She had the same turns and cadences, almost the same gestures, as if she had been on the platform; and the great queerness of it was that, with such a manner, she should escape being odious. She was not odious, she was delightful; she

was not dogmatic, she was genial. No wonder she was a success, if she speechified as a bird sings! Ransom could see, too, from her easy lapse, how the lecture-tone was the thing in the world with which, by education, by association, she was most familiar. He didn't know what to make of her; she was an astounding young phenomenon. The other time came back to him afresh, and how she had stood up at Miss Birdseye's; it occurred to him that an element, here, had been wanting. Several moments after she had ceased speaking he became conscious that the expression of his face presented a perceptible analogy to a broad grin. He changed his posture, saying the first thing that came into his head. "I presume you do without your father now."

"Without my father?"

"To set you going, as he did that time I heard you."

"Oh, I see; you thought I had begun a lecture!" And she laughed, in perfect good humour. "They tell me I speak as I talk, so I suppose I talk as I speak. But you mustn't put me on what I saw and heard in Europe. That's to be the title of an address I am now preparing, by the way. Yes, I don't depend on father any more," she went on, while Ransom's sense of having said too sarcastic a thing was deepened by her perfect indifference to it. "He finds his patients draw off about enough, any way. But I owe him everything; if it hadn't been for him, no one would ever have known I had a gift — not even myself. He started me so, once for all, that I now go alone."

"You go beautifully," said Ransom, wanting to say something agreeable, and even respectfully tender, to her, but troubled by the fact that there was nothing he could say that didn't sound rather like chaff. There was no resentment in her, however, for in a moment

she said to him, as quickly as it occurred to her, in the manner of a person repairing an accidental omission, "It was very good of you to come so far."

This was a sort of speech it was never safe to make to Ransom; there was no telling what retribution it might entail. "Do you suppose any journey is too great, too wearisome, when it's a question of so great a pleasure?" On this occasion it was not worse than that.

"Well, people *have* come from other cities," Verena answered, not with pretended humility, but with pretended pride. "Do you know Cambridge?"

"This is the first time I have ever been here."

"Well, I suppose you have heard of the university; it's so celebrated."

"Yes—even in Mississippi. I suppose it's very fine."

"I presume it is," said Verena; "but you can't expect me to speak with much admiration of an institution of which the doors are closed to our sex."

"Do you then advocate a system of education in common?"

"I advocate equal rights, equal opportunities, equal privileges. So does Miss Chancellor," Verena added, with just a perceptible air of feeling that her declaration needed support.

"Oh, I thought what she wanted was simply a different inequality—simply to turn out the men altogether," Ransom said.

"Well, she thinks we have great arrears to make up. I do tell her, sometimes, that what she desires is not only justice but vengeance. I think she admits that," Verena continued, with a certain solemnity. The subject, however, held her but an instant, and before Ransom had time to make any comment, she went on, in a different tone: "You don't mean to say you live in Mississippi *now*? Miss Chancellor

told me when you were in Boston before, that you had located in New York." She persevered in this reference to himself, for when he had assented to her remark about New York, she asked him whether he had quite given up the South.

"Given it up—the poor, dear, desolate old South? Heaven forbid!" Basil Ransom exclaimed.

She looked at him for a moment with an added softness. "I presume it is natural you should love your home. But I am afraid you think I don't love mine much; I have been here—for so long—so little. Miss Chancellor *has* absorbed me—there is no doubt about that. But it's a pity I wasn't with her to-day." Ransom made no answer to this; he was incapable of telling Miss Tarrant that if she had been he would not have called upon her. It was not, indeed, that he was not incapable of hypocrisy, for when she had asked him if he had seen his cousin the night before, and he had replied that he hadn't seen her at all, and she had exclaimed with a candour which the next minute made her blush, "Ah, you don't mean to say you haven't forgiven her!"—after this he put on a look of innocence sufficient to carry off the inquiry, "Forgiven her for what?"

Verena coloured at the sound of her own words. "Well, I could see how much she felt, that time at her house."

"What did she feel?" Basil Ransom asked, with the natural provokingness of a man.

I know not whether Verena was provoked, but she answered with more spirit than sequence: "Well, you know you *did* pour contempt on us, ever so much; I could see how it worked Olive up. Are you not going to see her at all?"

"Well, I shall think about that; I am here only for three or four days," said Ransom, smiling as men smile when they are perfectly unsatisfactory.

It is very possible that Verena was provoked, inaccessible as she was, in a general way, to irritation ; for she rejoined in a moment, with a little deliberate air : " Well, perhaps it's as well you shouldn't go, if you haven't changed at all."

" I haven't changed at all," said the young man, smiling still, with his elbows on the arms of his chair, his shoulders pushed up a little, and his thin brown hands interlocked in front of him.

" Well, I have had visitors who were quite opposed ! " Verena announced, as if such news could not possibly alarm her. Then she added, " How then did you know I was out here ? "

" Miss Birdseye told me."

" Oh, I am so glad you went to see *her* ! " the girl cried, speaking again with the impetuosity of a moment before.

" I didn't go to see her. I met her in the street, just as she was leaving Miss Chancellor's door. I spoke to her, and accompanied her some distance. I passed that way because I knew it was the direct way to Cambridge—from the Common—and I was coming out to see you any way—on the chance."

" On the chance ? " Verena repeated.

" Yes ; Mrs. Luna, in New York, told me you were sometimes here, and I wanted, at any rate, to make the attempt to find you."

It may be communicated to the reader that it was very agreeable to Verena to learn that her visitor had made this arduous pilgrimage (for she knew well enough how people in Boston regarded a winter journey to the academic suburb) with only half the prospect of a reward ; but her pleasure was mixed with other feelings, or at least with the consciousness that the whole situation was rather less simple than the elements of her life had been hitherto. There was the germ of disorder in this invidious distinction

which Mr. Ransom had suddenly made between Olive Chancellor, who was related to him by blood, and herself, who had never been related to him in any way whatever. She knew Olive by this time well enough to wish not to reveal it to her, and yet it would be something quite new for her to undertake to conceal such an incident as her having spent an hour with Mr. Ransom during a flying visit he had made to Boston. She had spent hours with other gentlemen, whom Olive didn't see; but that was different, because her friend knew about her doing it and didn't care, in regard to the persons—didn't care, that is, as she would care in this case. It was vivid to Verena's mind that now Olive *would* care. She had talked about Mr. Burrage, and Mr. Pardon, and even about some gentlemen in Europe, and she had not (after the first few days, a year and a half before) talked about Mr. Ransom.

Nevertheless there were reasons, clear to Verena's view, for wishing either that he would go and see Olive or would keep away from *her*; and the responsibility of treating the fact that he had not so kept away as a secret seemed the greater, perhaps, in the light of this other fact, that so far as simply seeing Mr. Ransom went—why, she quite liked it. She had remembered him perfectly after their two former meetings, superficial as their contact then had been; she had thought of him at moments and wondered whether she should like him if she were to know him better. Now, at the end of twenty minutes, she did know him better, and found that he had rather a curious, but still a pleasant way. There he was, at any rate, and she didn't wish his call to be spoiled by any uncomfortable implication of consequences. So she glanced off, at the touch of Mrs. Luna's name; it seemed to afford relief. "Oh yes, Mrs. Luna—isn't she fascinating?"

Ransom hesitated a little. "Well, no, I don't think she is."

"You ought to like her—she hates our movement!" And Verena asked, further, numerous questions about the brilliant Adeline; whether he saw her often, whether she went out much, whether she was admired in New York, whether he thought her very handsome. He answered to the best of his ability, but soon made the reflexion that he had not come out to Monadnoc Place to talk about Mrs. Luna; in consequence of which, to change the subject (as well as to acquit himself of a social duty), he began to speak of Verena's parents, to express regret that Mrs. Tarrant had been sick, and fear that he was not to have the pleasure of seeing her. "She is a great deal better," Verena said; "but she's lying down; she lies down a great deal when she has got nothing else to do. Mother's very peculiar," she added in a moment; "she lies down when she feels well and happy, and when she's sick she walks about—she roams all round the house. If you hear her on the stairs a good deal, you can be pretty sure she's very bad. She'll be very much interested to hear about you after you have left."

Ransom glanced at his watch. "I hope I am not staying too long—that I am not taking you away from her."

"Oh no; she likes visitors, even when she can't see them. If it didn't take her so long to rise, she would have been down here by this time. I suppose you think she has missed me, since I have been so absorbed. Well, so she has, but she knows it's for my good. She would make any sacrifice for affection."

The fancy suddenly struck Ransom of asking, in response to this, "And you? would you make any?"

Verena gave him a bright natural stare. "Any

sacrifice for affection ? " She thought a moment, and then she said : " I don't think I have a right to say, because I have never been asked. I don't remember ever to have had to make a sacrifice—not an important one."

" Lord ! you must have had a happy life ! "

" I have been very fortunate, I know that. I don't know what to do when I think how some women—how most women—suffer. But I must not speak of that," she went on, with her smile coming back to her. " If you oppose our movement, you won't want to hear of the suffering of women ! "

" The suffering of women is the suffering of all humanity," Ransom returned. " Do you think any movement is going to stop that—or all the lectures from now to doomsday ? We are born to suffer—and to bear it, like decent people."

" Oh, I adore heroism ! " Verena interposed.

" And as for women," Ransom went on, " they have one source of happiness that is closed to us—the consciousness that their presence here below lifts half the load of *our* suffering."

Verena thought this very graceful, but she was not sure it was not rather sophistical ; she would have liked to have Olive's judgement upon it. As that was not possible for the present, she abandoned the question (since learning that Mr. Ransom had passed over Olive, to come to her, she had become rather fidgety), and inquired of the young man, irrelevantly, whether he knew any one else in Cambridge.

" Not a creature ; as I tell you, I have never been here before. Your image alone attracted me ; this charming interview will be henceforth my only association with the place."

" It's a pity you couldn't have a few more," said Verena musingly.

"A few more interviews? I should be unspeakably delighted!"

"A few more associations. Did you see the colleges as you came?"

"I had a glimpse of a large enclosure, with some big buildings. Perhaps I can look at them better as I go back to Boston."

"Oh yes, you ought to see them—they have improved so much of late. The inner life, of course, is the greatest interest, but there is some fine architecture, if you are not familiar with Europe." She paused a moment, looking at him with an eye that seemed to brighten, and continued quickly, like a person who had collected herself for a little jump, "If you would like to walk round a little, I shall be very glad to show you."

"To walk round—with you to show me?" Ransom repeated. "My dear Miss Tarrant, it would be the greatest privilege—the greatest happiness—of my life. What a delightful idea—what an ideal guide!"

Verena got up; she would go and put on her hat; he must wait a little. Her offer had a frankness and friendliness which gave him a new sensation, and he could not know that as soon as she had made it (though she had hesitated too, with a moment of intense reflexion), she seemed to herself strangely reckless. An impulse pushed her; she obeyed it with her eyes open. She felt as a girl feels when she commits her first conscious indiscretion. She had done many things before which many people would have called indiscreet, but that quality had not even faintly belonged to them in her own mind; she had done them in perfect good faith and with a remarkable absence of palpitation. This superficially ingenuous proposal to walk around the colleges with Mr. Ransom had really another colour; it deepened the ambiguity of her position, by reason of a prevision which I shall

presently mention. If Olive was not to know that she had seen him, this extension of their interview would double her secret. And yet, while she saw it grow—this monstrous little mystery—she couldn't feel sorry that she was going out with Olive's cousin. As I have already said, she had become nervous. She went to put on her hat, but at the door of the room she stopped, turned round, and presented herself to her visitor with a small spot in either cheek, which had appeared there within the instant. "I have suggested this, because it seems to me I ought to do something for you—in return," she said. "It's nothing, simply sitting there with me. And we haven't got anything else. This is our only hospitality. And the day seems so splendid."

The modesty, the sweetness, of this little explanation, with a kind of intimated desire, constituting almost an appeal, for rightness, which seemed to pervade it, left a fragrance in the air after she had vanished. Ransom walked up and down the room, with his hands in his pockets, under the influence of it, without taking up even once the book about Mrs. Foat. He occupied the time in asking himself by what perversity of fate or of inclination such a charming creature was ranting upon platforms and living in Olive Chancellor's pocket, or how a ranter and sycophant could possibly be so engaging. And she was so disturbingly beautiful, too. This last fact was not less evident when she came down arranged for their walk. They left the house, and as they proceeded he remembered that he had asked himself earlier how he could do honour to such a combination of leisure and ethereal mildness as he had waked up to that morning—a mildness that seemed the very breath of his own latitude. This question was answered now; to do exactly what he was doing at that moment was an observance sufficiently festive.

XXV

THEY passed through two or three small, short streets, which, with their little wooden houses, with still more wooden door-yards, looked as if they had been constructed by the nearest carpenter and his boy—a sightless, soundless, interspaced, embryonic region—and entered a long avenue which, fringed on either side with fresh villas, offering themselves trustfully to the public, had the distinction of a wide pavement of neat red brick. The new paint on the square detached houses shone afar off in the transparent air: they had, on top, little cupolas and belvederes, in front a pillared piazza, made bare by the indoor life of winter, on either side a bow-window or two, and everywhere an embellishment of scallops, brackets, cornices, wooden flourishes. They stood, for the most part, on small eminences, lifted above the impertinence of hedge or paling, well up before the world, with all the good conscience which in many cases came, as Ransom saw (and he had noticed the same ornament when he traversed with Olive the quarter of Boston inhabited by Miss Birdseye), from a silvered number, affixed to the glass above the door, in figures huge enough to be read by the people who, in the periodic horse-cars, travelled along the middle of the avenue. It was to these glittering badges that many of the houses on either side owed their principal identity. One of the horse-cars now

advanced in the straight, spacious distance ; it was almost the only object that animated the prospect, which, in its large cleanness, its implication of strict business-habits on the part of all the people who were not there, Ransom thought very impressive. As he went on with Verena he asked her about the Women's Convention, the year before ; whether it had accomplished much work and she had enjoyed it.

" What do you care about the work it accomplished ? " said the girl. " You don't take any interest in that."

" You mistake my attitude. I don't like it, but I greatly fear it."

In answer to this Verena gave a free laugh. " I don't believe you fear much ! "

" The bravest men have been afraid of women. Won't you even tell me whether you enjoyed it ? I am told you made an immense sensation there— that you leaped into fame."

Verena never waved off an allusion to her ability, her eloquence ; she took it seriously, without any flutter or protest, and had no more manner about it than if it concerned the goddess Minerva. " I believe I attracted considerable attention ; of course, that's what Olive wants — it paves the way for future work. I have no doubt I reached many that wouldn't have been reached otherwise. They think that's my great use—to take hold of the outsiders, as it were ; of those who are prejudiced or thoughtless, or who don't care about anything unless it's amusing. I wake up the attention."

" That's the class to which I belong," Ransom said. " Am I not an outsider ? I wonder whether you would have reached me — or waked up my attention ! "

Verena was silent awhile, as they walked ; he heard the light click of her boots on the smooth bricks.

Then—"I think I *have* waked it up a little," she replied, looking straight before her.

"Most assuredly! You have made me wish tremendously to contradict you."

"Well, that's a good sign."

"I suppose it was very exciting—your convention," Ransom went on, in a moment; "the sort of thing you would miss very much if you were to return to the ancient fold."

"The ancient fold, you say very well, where women were slaughtered like sheep! Oh, last June, for a week, we just quivered! There were delegates from every State and every city; we lived in a crowd of people and of ideas; the heat was intense, the weather magnificent, and great thoughts and brilliant sayings flew round like darting fireflies. Olive had six celebrated, high-minded women staying in her house—two in a room; and in the summer evenings we sat in the open windows, in her parlour, looking out on the bay, with the lights gleaming in the water, and talked over the doings of the morning, the speeches, the incidents, the fresh contributions to the cause. We had some tremendously earnest discussions, which it would have been a benefit to you to hear, or any man who doesn't think that we can rise to the highest point. Then we had some refreshment—we consumed quantities of ice-cream!" said Verena, in whom the note of gaiety alternated with that of earnestness, almost of exaltation, in a manner which seemed to Basil Ransom absolutely and fascinatingly original. "Those were great nights!" she added, between a laugh and a sigh.

Her description of the convention put the scene before him vividly; he seemed to see the crowded, overheated hall, which he was sure was filled with carpet-baggers, to hear flushed women, with loosened bonnet-strings, forcing thin voices into ineffectual

shrillness. It made him angry, and all the more angry, that he hadn't a reason, to think of the charming creature at his side being mixed up with such elements, pushed and elbowed by them, conjoined with them in emulation, in unsightly strainings and clappings and shoutings, in wordy, windy iteration of inanities. Worst of all was the idea that she should have expressed such a congregation to itself so acceptably, have been acclaimed and applauded by hoarse throats, have been lifted up, to all the vulgar multitude, as the queen of the occasion. He made the reflexion, afterwards, that he was singularly ill-grounded in his wrath, inasmuch as it was none of his business what use Miss Tarrant chose to make of her energies, and, in addition to this, nothing else was to have been expected of her. But that reflexion was absent now, and in its absence he saw only the fact that his companion had been odiously perverted. "Well, Miss Tarrant," he said, with a deeper seriousness than showed in his voice, "I am forced to the painful conclusion that you are simply ruined."

"Ruined? Ruined yourself!"

"Oh, I know the kind of women that Miss Chancellor had at her house, and what a group you must have made when you looked out at the Back Bay! It depresses me very much to think of it."

"We made a lovely, interesting group, and if we had had a spare minute we would have been photographed," Verena said.

This led him to ask her if she had ever subjected herself to the process; and she answered that a photographer had been after her as soon as she got back from Europe, and that she had sat for him, and that there were certain shops in Boston where her portrait could be obtained. She gave him this information very simply, without pretence of vagueness of knowledge, spoke of the matter rather respect-

fully, indeed, as if it might be of some importance; and when he said that he should go and buy one of the little pictures as soon as he returned to town, contented herself with replying, "Well, be sure you pick out a good one!" He had not been altogether without a hope that she would offer to give him one, with her name written beneath, which was a mode of acquisition he would greatly have preferred; but this, evidently, had not occurred to her, and now, as they went further, her thought was following a different train. That was proved by her remarking, at the end of a silence, inconsequently, "Well, it showed I have a great use!" As he stared, wondering what she meant, she explained that she referred to the brilliancy of her success at the convention. "It proved I have a great use," she repeated, "and that is all I care for!"

"The use of a truly amiable woman is to make some honest man happy," Ransom said, with a sententiousness of which he was perfectly aware.

It was so marked that it caused her to stop short in the middle of the broad walk, while she looked at him with shining eyes. "See here, Mr. Ransom, do you know what strikes me?" she exclaimed. "The interest you take in me isn't really controversial—a bit. It's quite personal!" She was the most extraordinary girl; she could speak such words as those without the smallest look of added consciousness coming into her face, without the least supposable intention of coquetry, or any visible purpose of challenging the young man to say more.

"My interest in you—my interest in you," he began. Then hesitating, he broke off suddenly. "It is certain your discovery doesn't make it any less!"

"Well, that's better," she went on; "for we needn't dispute."

He laughed at the way she arranged it, and they

presently reached the irregular group of heterogeneous buildings — chapels, dormitories, libraries, halls — which, scattered among slender trees, over a space reserved by means of a low rustic fence, rather than enclosed (for Harvard knows nothing either of the jealousy or the dignity of high walls and guarded gateways), constitutes the great university of Massachusetts. The yard, or college-precinct, is traversed by a number of straight little paths, over which, at certain hours of the day, a thousand undergraduates, with books under their arm and youth in their step, flit from one school to another. Verena Tarrant knew her way round, as she said to her companion ; it was not the first time she had taken an admiring visitor to see the local monuments. Basil Ransom, walking with her from point to point, admired them all, and thought several of them exceedingly quaint and venerable. The rectangular structures of old red brick especially gratified his eye ; the afternoon sun was yellow on their homely faces ; their windows showed a peep of flower-pots and bright-coloured curtains ; they wore an expression of scholastic quietude, and exhaled for the young Mississippian a tradition, an antiquity. " This is the place where I ought to have been," he said to his charming guide. " I should have had a good time if I had been able to study here."

" Yes ; I presume you feel yourself drawn to any place where ancient prejudices are garnered up," she answered, not without archness. " I know by the stand you take about our cause that you share the superstitions of the old bookmen. You ought to have been at one of those really mediæval universities that we saw on the other side, at Oxford, or Göttingen, or Padua. You would have been in perfect sympathy with their spirit."

" Well, I don't know much about those old haunts,"

Ransom rejoined. "I reckon this is good enough for me. And then it would have had the advantage that your residence isn't far, you know."

"Oh, I guess we shouldn't have seen you much at my residence! As you live in New York, you come, but here you wouldn't; that is always the way." With this light philosophy Verena beguiled the transit to the library, into which she introduced her companion with the air of a person familiar with the sanctified spot. This edifice, a diminished copy of the chapel of King's College, at the greater Cambridge, is a rich and impressive institution; and as he stood there, in the bright, heated stillness, which seemed suffused with the odour of old print and old bindings, and looked up into the high, light vaults that hung over quiet book-laden galleries, alcoves and tables, and glazed cases where rarer treasures gleamed more vaguely, over busts of benefactors and portraits of worthies, bowed heads of working students and the gentle creak of passing messengers — as he took possession, in a comprehensive glance, of the wealth and wisdom of the place, he felt more than ever the soreness of an opportunity missed; but he abstained from expressing it (it was too deep for that), and in a moment Verena had introduced him to a young lady, a friend of hers, who, as she explained, was working on the catalogue, and whom she had asked for on entering the library, at a desk where another young lady was occupied. Miss Catching, the first-mentioned young lady, presented herself with promptness, offered Verena a low-toned but appreciative greeting, and, after a little, undertook to explain to Ransom the mysteries of the catalogue, which consisted of a myriad little cards, disposed alphabetically in immense chests of drawers. Ransom was deeply interested, and as, with Verena, he followed Miss Catching about (she was so good as to show them the

establishment in all its ramifications), he considered with attention the young lady's fair ringlets and refined, anxious expression, saying to himself that this was in the highest degree a New England type. Verena found an opportunity to mention to him that she was wrapped up in the cause, and there was a moment during which he was afraid that his companion would expose him to her as one of its traducers; but there was that in Miss Catching's manner (and in the influence of the lofty halls) which deprecated loud pleasantry, and seemed to say, moreover, that if she were treated to such a revelation she should not know under what letter to range it.

"Now there is one place where perhaps it would be indelicate to take a Mississippian," Verena said, after this episode. "I mean the great place that towers above the others—that big building with the beautiful pinnacles, which you see from every point." But Basil Ransom had heard of the great Memorial Hall; he knew what memories it enshrined, and the worst that he should have to suffer there; and the ornate, overtopping structure, which was the finest piece of architecture he had ever seen, had moreover solicited his enlarged curiosity for the last half-hour. He thought there was rather too much brick about it, but it was buttressed, cloistered, turreted, dedicated, superscribed, as he had never seen anything; though it didn't look old, it looked significant; it covered a large area, and it sprang majestic into the winter air. It was detached from the rest of the collegiate group, and stood in a grassy triangle of its own. As he approached it with Verena she suddenly stopped, to decline responsibility. "Now mind, if you don't like what's inside, it isn't my fault."

He looked at her an instant, smiling. "Is there anything against Mississippi?"

"Well, no, I don't think she is mentioned. But there is great praise of our young men in the war."

"It says they were brave, I suppose."

"Yes, it says so in Latin."

"Well, so they were—I know something about that," Basil Ransom said. "I must be brave enough to face them—it isn't the first time." And they went up the low steps and passed into the tall doors. The Memorial Hall of Harvard consists of three main divisions: one of them a theatre, for academic ceremonies; another a vast refectory, covered with a timbered roof, hung about with portraits and lighted by stained windows, like the halls of the colleges of Oxford; and the third, the most interesting, a chamber high, dim, and severe, consecrated to the sons of the university who fell in the long Civil War. Ransom and his companion wandered from one part of the building to another, and stayed their steps at several impressive points; but they lingered longest in the presence of the white, ranged tablets, each of which, in its proud, sad clearness, is inscribed with the name of a student-soldier. The effect of the place is singularly noble and solemn, and it is impossible to feel it without a lifting of the heart. It stands there for duty and honour, it speaks of sacrifice and example, seems a kind of temple to youth, manhood, generosity. Most of them were young, all were in their prime, and all of them had fallen; this simple idea hovers before the visitor and makes him read with tenderness each name and place—names often without other history, and forgotten Southern battles. For Ransom these things were not a challenge nor a taunt; they touched him with respect, with the sentiment of beauty. He was capable of being a generous foeman, and he forgot, now, the whole question of sides and parties;

the simple emotion of the old fighting-time came back to him, and the monument around him seemed an embodiment of that memory; it arched over friends as well as enemies, the victims of defeat as well as the sons of triumph.

"It is very beautiful—but I think it is very dreadful!" This remark, from Verena, called him back to the present. "It's a real sin to put up such a building, just to glorify a lot of bloodshed. If it wasn't so majestic, I would have it pulled down."

"That is delightful feminine logic!" Ransom answered. "If, when women have the conduct of affairs, they fight as well as they reason, surely for them too we shall have to set up memorials."

Verena retorted that they would reason so well they would have no need to fight—they would usher in the reign of peace. "But this is very peaceful too," she added, looking about her; and she sat down on a low stone ledge, as if to enjoy the influence of the scene. Ransom left her alone for ten minutes; he wished to take another look at the inscribed tablets, and read again the names of the various engagements, at several of which he had been present. When he came back to her she greeted him abruptly, with a question which had no reference to the solemnity of the spot. "If Miss Birdseye knew you were coming out to see me, can't *she* easily tell Olive? Then won't Olive make her reflexions about your neglect of herself?"

"I don't care for her reflexions. At any rate, I asked Miss Birdseye, as a favour, not to mention to her that she had met me," Ransom added.

Verena was silent a moment. "Your logic is almost as good as a woman's. Do change your mind and go to see her now," she went on. "She will probably be at home by the time you get to Charles Street. If she was a little strange, a little stiff with

you before (I know just how she must have been), all that will be different to-day."

"Why will it be different?"

"Oh, she will be easier, more genial, much softer."

"I don't believe it," said Ransom; and his scepticism seemed none the less complete because it was light and smiling.

"She is much happier now—she can afford not to mind you."

"Not to mind me? That's a nice inducement for a gentleman to go and see a lady!"

"Well, she will be more gracious, because she feels now that she is more successful."

"You mean because she has brought you out? Oh, I have no doubt that has cleared the air for her immensely, and you have improved her very much. But I have got a charming impression out here, and I have no wish to put another—which won't be charming, anyhow you arrange it—on top of it."

"Well, she will be sure to know you have been round here, at any rate," Verena rejoined.

"How will she know, unless you tell her?"

"I tell her everything," said the girl; and now as soon as she had spoken, she blushed. He stood before her, tracing a figure on the mosaic pavement with his cane, conscious that in a moment they had become more intimate. They were discussing their affairs, which had nothing to do with the heroic symbols that surrounded them; but their affairs had suddenly grown so serious that there was no want of decency in their lingering there for the purpose. The implication that his visit might remain as a secret between them made them both feel it differently. To ask her to keep it so would have been, as it seemed to Ransom, a liberty, and, moreover, he didn't care so much as that; but if she were to prefer to do so such a preference would only make

him consider the more that his expedition had been a success.

"Oh, then, you can tell her this!" he said in a moment.

"If I shouldn't, it would be the first——" And Verena checked herself.

"You must arrange that with your conscience," Ransom went on, laughing.

They came out of the hall, passed down the steps, and emerged from the Delta, as that portion of the college precinct is called. The afternoon had begun to wane, but the air was filled with a pink brightness, and there was a cool, pure smell, a vague breath of spring.

"Well, if I don't tell Olive, then you must leave me here," said Verena, stopping in the path and putting out a hand of farewell.

"I don't understand. What has that to do with it? Besides I thought you said you *must* tell," Ransom added. In playing with the subject this way, in enjoying her visible hesitation, he was slightly conscious of a man's brutality—of being pushed by an impulse to test her good-nature, which seemed to have no limit. It showed no sign of perturbation as she answered:

"Well, I want to be free—to do as I think best. And, if there is a chance of my keeping it back, there mustn't be anything more—there must not, Mr. Ransom, really."

"Anything more? Why, what are you afraid there will be—if I should simply walk home with you?"

"I must go alone, I must hurry back to mother," she said, for all reply. And she again put out her hand, which he had not taken before.

Of course he took it now, and even held it a moment; he didn't like being dismissed, and was

thinking of pretexts to linger. "Miss Birdseye said you would convert me, but you haven't yet," it came into his head to say.

"You can't tell yet; wait a little. My influence is peculiar; it sometimes comes out a long time afterwards!" This speech, on Verena's part, was evidently perfunctory, and the grandeur of her self-reference jocular; she was much more serious when she went on quickly, "Do you mean to say Miss Birdseye promised you that?"

"Oh yes. Talk about influence! you should have seen the influence I obtained over her."

"Well, what good will it do, if I'm going to tell Olive about your visit?"

"Well, you see, I think she hopes you won't. She believes you are going to convert me privately—so that I shall blaze forth, suddenly, out of the darkness of Mississippi, as a first-class proselyte: very effective and dramatic."

Verena struck Basil Ransom as constantly simple, but there were moments when her candour seemed to him preternatural. "If I thought that would be the effect, I might make an exception," she remarked, speaking as if such a result were, after all, possible.

"Oh, Miss Tarrant, you will convert me enough, any way," said the young man.

"Enough? What do you mean by enough?"

"Enough to make me terribly unhappy."

She looked at him a moment, evidently not understanding; but she tossed him a retort at a venture, turned away, and took her course homeward. The retort was that if he should be unhappy it would serve him right—a form of words that committed her to nothing. As he returned to Boston he saw how curious he should be to learn whether she had betrayed him, as it were, to Miss Chancellor. He might learn through Mrs. Luna; that would almost

reconcile him to going to see her again. Olive would mention it in writing to her sister, and Adeline would repeat the complaint. Perhaps she herself would even make him a scene about it; that would be, for him, part of the unhappiness he had foretold to Verena Tarrant.

XXVI

"Mrs. Henry Burrage, at home Wednesday evening, March 26th, at half-past nine o'clock." It was in consequence of having received a card with these words inscribed upon it that Basil Ransom presented himself, on the evening she had designated, at the house of a lady he had never heard of before. The account of the relation of effect to cause is not complete, however, unless I mention that the card bore, furthermore, in the left-hand lower corner, the words: "An Address from Miss Verena Tarrant." He had an idea (it came mainly from the look and even the odour of the engraved pasteboard) that Mrs. Burrage was a member of the fashionable world, and it was with considerable surprise that he found himself in such an element. He wondered what had induced a denizen of that fine air to send him an invitation; then he said to himself that, obviously, Verena Tarrant had simply requested that this should be done. Mrs. Henry Burrage, whoever she might be, had asked her if she shouldn't like some of her own friends to be present, and she had said, Oh yes, and mentioned him in the happy group. She had been able to give Mrs. Burrage his address, for had it not been contained in the short letter he despatched to Monadnoc Place soon after his return from Boston, in which he thanked Miss Tarrant afresh for the charming hour she had enabled him to spend at

Cambridge? She had not answered his letter at the time, but Mrs. Burrage's card was a very good answer. Such a missive deserved a rejoinder, and it was by way of rejoinder that he entered the street car which, on the evening of March 26th, was to deposit him at a corner adjacent to Mrs. Burrage's dwelling. He almost never went to evening parties (he knew scarcely any one who gave them, though Mrs. Luna had broken him in a little), and he was sure this occasion was of festive intention, would have nothing in common with the nocturnal "exercises" at Miss Birdseye's; but he would have exposed himself to almost any social discomfort in order to see Verena Tarrant on the platform. The platform it evidently was to be—private if not public—since one was admitted by a ticket given away if not sold. He took his in his pocket, quite ready to present it at the door. It would take some time for me to explain the contradiction to the reader; but Basil Ransom's desire to be present at one of Verena's regular performances was not diminished by the fact that he detested her views and thought the whole business a poor perversity. He understood her now very well (since his visit to Cambridge); he saw she was honest and natural; she had queer, bad lecture-blood in her veins, and a comically false idea of the aptitude of little girls for conducting movements; but her enthusiasm was of the purest, her illusions had a fragrance, and so far as the mania for producing herself personally was concerned, it had been distilled into her by people who worked her for ends which to Basil Ransom could only appear insane. She was a touching, ingenuous victim, unconscious of the pernicious forces which were hurrying her to her ruin. With this idea of ruin there had already associated itself in the young man's mind, the idea—a good

deal more dim and incomplete—of rescue; and it was the disposition to confirm himself in the view that her charm was her own, and her fallacies, her absurdity, a mere reflexion of unlucky circumstance, that led him to make an effort to behold her in the position in which he could least bear to think of her. Such a glimpse was all that was wanted to prove to him that she was a person for whom he might open an unlimited credit of tender compassion. He expected to suffer—to suffer deliciously.

By the time he had crossed Mrs. Burrage's threshold there was no doubt whatever in his mind that he was in the fashionable world. It was embodied strikingly in the stout, elderly, ugly lady, dressed in a brilliant colour, with a twinkle of jewels and a bosom much uncovered, who stood near the door of the first room, and with whom the people passing in before him were shaking hands. Ransom made her a Mississippian bow, and she said she was delighted to see him, while people behind him pressed him forward. He yielded to the impulsion, and found himself in a great saloon, amid lights and flowers, where the company was dense, and there were more twinkling, smiling ladies, with uncovered bosoms. It was certainly the fashionable world, for there was no one there whom he had ever seen before. The walls of the room were covered with pictures—the very ceiling was painted and framed. The people pushed each other a little, edged about, advanced and retreated, looking at each other with differing faces—sometimes blandly, unperceivingly, sometimes with a harshness of contemplation, a kind of cruelty, Ransom thought; sometimes with sudden nods and grimaces, inarticulate murmurs, followed by a quick reaction, a sort of gloom. He was now absolutely certain that he was in the best society. He was carried further and further forward, and saw that another room stretched

beyond the one he had entered, in which there was a sort of little stage, covered with a red cloth, and an immense collection of chairs, arranged in rows. He became aware that people looked at him, as well as at each other, rather more, indeed, than at each other, and he wondered whether it were very visible in his appearance that his being there was a kind of exception. He didn't know how much his head looked over the heads of others, or that his brown complexion, fuliginous eye, and straight black hair, the leonine fall of which I mentioned in the first pages of this narrative, gave him that relief which, in the best society, has the great advantage of suggesting a topic. But there were other topics besides, as was proved by a fragment of conversation, between two ladies, which reached his ear while he stood rather wistfully wondering where Verena Tarrant might be.

"Are you a member?" one of the ladies said to the other. "I didn't know you had joined."

"Oh, I haven't; nothing would induce me."

"That's not fair; you have all the fun and none of the responsibility."

"Oh, the — the fun!" exclaimed the second lady.

"You needn't abuse us, or I will never invite you," said the first.

"Well, I thought it was meant to be improving; that's all I mean; very good for the mind. Now, this woman to-night; isn't she from Boston?"

"Yes, I believe they have brought her on, just for this."

"Well, you must be pretty desperate when you have got to go to Boston for your entertainment."

"Well, there's a similar society there, and I never heard of their sending to New York."

"Of course not, they think they have got every-

thing. But doesn't it make your life a burden thinking what you can possibly have ? "

" Oh dear, no. I am going to have Professor Gougenheim — all about the Talmud. You must come."

" Well, I'll come," said the second lady ; " but nothing would induce me to be a regular member."

Whatever the mystic circle might be, Ransom agreed with the second lady that regular membership must have terrors, and he admired her independence in such an artificial world. A considerable part of the company had now directed itself to the further apartment—people had begun to occupy the chairs, to confront the empty platform. He reached the wide doors, and saw that the place was a spacious music-room, decorated in white and gold, with a polished floor and marble busts of composers, on brackets attached to the delicate panels. He forbore to enter, however, being shy about taking a seat, and seeing that the ladies were arranging themselves first. He turned back into the first room, to wait till the audience had massed itself, conscious that even if he were behind every one he should be able to make a long neck ; and here, suddenly, in a corner, his eyes rested upon Olive Chancellor. She was seated a little apart, in an angle of the room, and she was looking straight at him ; but as soon as she perceived that he saw her she dropped her eyes, giving no sign of recognition. Ransom hesitated a moment, but the next he went straight over to her. It had been in his mind that if Verena Tarrant was there, *she* would be there ; an instinct told him that Miss Chancellor would not allow her dear friend to come to New York without her. It was very possible she meant to " cut " him —especially if she knew of his having cut her, the other week, in Boston ; but it was his duty to take

for granted she would speak to him, until the contrary should be definitely proved. Though he had seen her only twice he remembered well how acutely shy she was capable of being, and he thought it possible one of these spasms had seized her at the present time.

When he stood before her he found his conjecture perfectly just; she was white with the intensity of her self-consciousness; she was altogether in a very uncomfortable state. She made no response to his offer to shake hands with her, and he saw that she would never go through that ceremony again. She looked up at him when he spoke to her, and her lips moved; but her face was intensely grave and her eye had almost a feverish light. She had evidently got into her corner to be out of the way; he recognised in her the air of an interloper, as he had felt it in himself. The small sofa on which she had placed herself had the form to which the French give the name of *causeuse*; there was room on it for just another person, and Ransom asked her, with a cheerful accent, if he might sit down beside her. She turned towards him when he had done so, turned everything but her eyes, and opened and shut her fan while she waited for her fit of diffidence to pass away. Ransom himself did not wait; he took a jocular tone about their encounter, asking her if she had come to New York to rouse the people. She glanced round the room; the backs of Mrs. Burrage's guests, mainly, were presented to them, and their position was partly masked by a pyramid of flowers which rose from a pedestal close to Olive's end of the sofa and diffused a fragrance in the air.

"Do you call these 'the people'?" she asked.

"I haven't the least idea. I don't know who any of them are, not even who Mrs. Henry Burrage is, I simply received an invitation."

Miss Chancellor gave him no information on the

point he had mentioned ; she only said, in a moment : " Do you go wherever you are invited ? "

" Why, I go if I think I may find you there," the young man replied gallantly. " My card mentioned that Miss Tarrant would give an address, and I knew that wherever she is you are not far off. I have heard you are inseparable, from Mrs. Luna."

" Yes, we are inseparable. That is exactly why I am here."

" It's the fashionable world, then, you are going to stir up."

Olive remained for some time with her eyes fastened to the floor ; then she flashed them up at her interlocutor. " It's a part of our life to go anywhere—to carry our work where it seems most needed. We have taught ourselves to stifle repulsion, distaste."

" Oh, I think this is very amusing," said Ransom. " It's a beautiful house, and there are some very pretty faces. We haven't anything so brilliant in Mississippi."

To everything he said Olive offered at first a momentary silence, but the worst of her shyness was apparently leaving her.

" Are you successful in New York ? do you like it ? " she presently asked, uttering the inquiry in a tone of infinite melancholy, as if the eternal sense of duty forced it from her lips.

" Oh, successful ! I am not successful as you and Miss Tarrant are ; for (to my barbaric eyes) it is a great sign of prosperity to be the heroines of an occasion like this."

" Do I look like the heroine of an occasion ? " asked Olive Chancellor, without an intention of humour, but with an effect that was almost comical.

" You would if you didn't hide yourself away. Are you not going into the other room to hear the speech ? Everything is prepared."

"I am going when I am notified—when I am invited."

There was considerable majesty in her tone, and Ransom saw that something was wrong, that she felt neglected. To see that she was as ticklish with others as she had been with him made him feel forgiving, and there was in his manner a perfect disposition to forget their differences as he said, "Oh, there is plenty of time; the place isn't half full yet."

She made no direct rejoinder to this, but she asked him about his mother and sisters, what news he received from the South. "Have they any happiness?" she inquired, rather as if she warned him to take care not to pretend they had. He neglected her warning to the point of saying that there was one happiness they always had—that of having learned not to think about it too much, and to make the best of their circumstances. She listened to this with an air of great reserve, and apparently thought he had wished to give her a lesson; for she suddenly broke out, "You mean that you have traced a certain line for them, and that that's all you know about it!"

Ransom stared at her, surprised; he felt, now, that she would always surprise him. "Ah, don't be rough with me," he said, in his soft Southern voice; "don't you remember how you knocked me about when I called on you in Boston?"

"You hold us in chains, and then, when we writhe in our agony, you say we don't behave prettily!" These words, which did not lessen Ransom's wonderment, were the young lady's answer to his deprecatory speech. She saw that he was honestly bewildered and that in a moment more he would laugh at her, as he had done a year and a half before (she remembered it as if it had been

yesterday); and to stop that off, at any cost, she went on hurriedly—"If you listen to Miss Tarrant, you will know what I mean."

"Oh, Miss Tarrant—Miss Tarrant!" And Basil Ransom's laughter came.

She had not escaped that mockery, after all, and she looked at him sharply now, her embarrassment having quite cleared up. "What do you know about her? What observation have you had?"

Ransom met her eye, and for a moment they scrutinised each other. Did she know of his interview with Verena a month before, and was her reserve simply the wish to place on him the burden of declaring that he had been to Boston since they last met, and yet had not called in Charles Street? He thought there was suspicion in her face; but in regard to Verena she would always be suspicious. If he had done at that moment just what would gratify him he would have said to her that he knew a great deal about Miss Tarrant, having lately had a long walk and talk with her; but he checked himself, with the reflexion that if Verena had not betrayed him it would be very wrong in him to betray her. The sweetness of the idea that she should have thought the episode of his visit to Monadnoc Place worth placing under the rose, was quenched for the moment in his regret at not being able to let his disagreeable cousin know that he had passed *her* over. "Don't you remember my hearing her speak that night at Miss Birdseye's?" he said presently. "And I met her the next day at your house, you know."

"She has developed greatly since then," Olive remarked dryly; and Ransom felt sure that Verena had held her tongue.

At this moment a gentleman made his way through the clusters of Mrs. Burrage's guests and presented

himself to Olive. "If you will do me the honour to take my arm I will find a good seat for you in the other room. It's getting to be time for Miss Tarrant to reveal herself. I have been taking her into the picture-room; there were some things she wanted to see. She is with my mother now," he added, as if Miss Chancellor's grave face constituted a sort of demand for an explanation of her friend's absence. "She said she was a little nervous; so I thought we would just move about."

"It's the first time I have ever heard of that!" said Olive Chancellor, preparing to surrender herself to the young man's guidance. He told her that he had reserved the best seat for her; it was evidently his desire to conciliate her, to treat her as a person of importance. Before leading her away, he shook hands with Ransom and remarked that he was very glad to see him; and Ransom saw that he must be the master of the house, though he could scarcely be the son of the stout lady in the doorway. He was a fresh, pleasant, handsome young man, with a bright friendly manner; he recommended Ransom to take a seat in the other room, without delay; if he had never heard Miss Tarrant he would have one of the greatest pleasures of his life.

"Oh, Mr. Ransom only comes to ventilate his prejudices," Miss Chancellor said, as she turned her back to her kinsman. He shrank from pushing into the front of the company, which was now rapidly filling the music-room, and contented himself with lingering in the doorway, where several gentlemen were stationed. The seats were all occupied; all, that is, save one, towards which he saw Miss Chancellor and her companion direct themselves, squeezing and edging past the people who were standing up against the walls. This was quite in front, close to the little platform; every one noticed Olive as she went,

and Ransom heard a gentleman near him say to another—" I guess she's one of the same kind." He looked for Verena, but she was apparently keeping out of sight. Suddenly he felt himself smartly tapped on the back, and, turning round, perceived Mrs. Luna, who had been prodding him with her fan.

XXVII

"You won't speak to me in my own house—that I have almost grown used to; but if you are going to pass me over in public I think you might give me warning first." This was only her archness, and he knew what to make of that now; she was dressed in yellow and looked very plump and gay. He wondered at the unerring instinct by which she had discovered his exposed quarter. The outer room was completely empty; she had come in at the further door and found the field free for her operations. He offered to find her a place where she could see and hear Miss Tarrant, to get her a chair to stand on, even, if she wished to look over the heads of the gentlemen in the doorway; a proposal which she greeted with the inquiry—"Do you suppose I came here for the sake of that chatterbox? haven't I told you what I think of her?"

"Well, you certainly did not come here for my sake," said Ransom, anticipating this insinuation; "for you couldn't possibly have known I was coming."

"I guessed it—a presentiment told me!" Mrs. Luna declared; and she looked up at him with searching, accusing eyes. "I know what you have come for," she cried in a moment. "You never mentioned to me that you knew Mrs. Burrage!"

"I don't—I never had heard of her till she asked me."

"Then why in the world *did* she ask you?"

Ransom had spoken a trifle rashly; it came over him, quickly, that there were reasons why he had better not have said that. But almost as quickly he covered up his mistake. "I suppose your sister was so good as to ask for a card for me."

"My sister? My grandmother! I know how Olive loves you. Mr. Ransom, you are very deep." She had drawn him well into the room, out of earshot of the group in the doorway, and he felt that if she should be able to compass her wish she would organise a little entertainment for herself, in the outer drawing-room, in opposition to Miss Tarrant's address. "Please come and sit down here a moment; we shall be quite undisturbed. I have something very particular to say to you." She led the way to the little sofa in the corner, where he had been talking with Olive a few minutes before, and he accompanied her, with extreme reluctance, grudging the moments that he should be obliged to give to her. He had quite forgotten that he once had a vision of spending his life in her society, and he looked at his watch as he made the observation:

"I haven't the least idea of losing any of the sport in there, you know."

He felt, the next instant, that he oughtn't to have said that either; but he was irritated, disconcerted, and he couldn't help it. It was in the nature of a gallant Mississippian to do everything a lady asked him, and he had never, remarkable as it may appear, been in the position of finding such a request so incompatible with his own desires as now. It was a new predicament, for Mrs. Luna evidently meant to keep him if she could. She looked round the room, more and more pleased at their having it to themselves, and for the moment said nothing more about the singularity of his being there. On the contrary,

she became freshly jocular, remarked that now they had got hold of him they wouldn't easily let him go, they would make him entertain them, induce him to give a lecture—on the "Lights and Shadows of Southern Life," or the "Social Peculiarities of Mississippi"—before the Wednesday Club.

"And what in the world is the Wednesday Club? I suppose it's what those ladies were talking about," Ransom said.

"I don't know your ladies, but the Wednesday Club is this thing. I don't mean you and me here together, but all those deluded beings in the other room. It is New York trying to be like Boston. It is the culture, the good form, of the metropolis. You might not think it, but it is. It's the 'quiet set'; they *are* quiet enough; you might hear a pin drop, in there. Is some one going to offer up a prayer? How happy Olive must be, to be taken so seriously! They form an association for meeting at each other's houses, every week, and having some performance, or some paper read, or some subject explained. The more dreary it is and the more fearful the subject, the more they think it is what it ought to be. They have an idea this is the way to make New York society intellectual. There's a sumptuary law—isn't that what you call it?—about suppers, and they restrict themselves to a kind of Spartan broth. When it's made by their French cooks it isn't bad. Mrs. Burrage is one of the principal members—one of the founders, I believe; and when her turn has come round, formerly—it comes only once in the winter for each—I am told she has usually had very good music. But that is thought rather a base evasion, a begging of the question; the vulgar set can easily keep up with them on music. So Mrs. Burrage conceived the extraordinary idea"—and it was wonderful to hear

how Mrs. Luna pronounced that adjective—"of sending on to Boston for that girl. It was her son, of course, who put it into her head; he has been at Cambridge for some years—that's where Verena lived, you know—and he was as thick with her as you please out there. Now that he is no longer there it suits him very well to have her here. She is coming on a visit to his mother when Olive goes. I asked them to stay with me, but Olive declined, majestically; she said they wished to be in some place where they would be free to receive 'sympathising friends.' So they are staying at some extraordinary kind of New Jerusalem boarding-house, in Tenth Street; Olive thinks it's her duty to go to such places. I was greatly surprised that she should let Verena be drawn into such a worldly crowd as this; but she told me they had made up their minds not to let *any* occasion slip, that they could sow the seed of truth in drawing-rooms as well as in workshops, and that if a single person was brought round to their ideas they should have been justified in coming on. That's what they are doing in there—sowing the seed; but you shall not be the one that's brought round, I shall take care of that. Have you seen my delightful sister yet? The way she *does* arrange herself when she wants to protest against frills! She looks as if she thought it pretty barren ground round here, now she has come to see it. I don't think she thinks you can be saved in a French dress, anyhow. I must say I call it a *very* base evasion of Mrs. Burrage's, producing Verena Tarrant; it's worse than the meretricious music. Why didn't she honestly send for a *ballerina* from Niblo's—if she wanted a young woman capering about on a platform? They don't care a fig about poor Olive's ideas; it's only because Verena has strange hair, and shiny eyes, and gets herself up like a presti-

digitator's assistant. I have never understood how Olive can reconcile herself to Verena's really low style of dress. I suppose it's only because her clothes are so fearfully made. You look as if you didn't believe me—but I assure you that the cut is revolutionary; and that's a salve to Olive's conscience."

Ransom was surprised to hear that he looked as if he didn't believe her, for he had found himself, after his first uneasiness, listening with considerable interest to her account of the circumstances under which Miss Tarrant was visiting New York. After a moment, as the result of some private reflexion, he propounded this question: "Is the son of the lady of the house a handsome young man, very polite, in a white vest?"

"I don't know the colour of his vest—but he has a kind of fawning manner. Verena judges from that that he is in love with her."

"Perhaps he is," said Ransom. "You say it was his idea to get her to come on."

"Oh, he likes to flirt; that is highly probable."

"Perhaps she has brought him round."

"Not to where she wants, I think. The property is very large; he will have it all one of these days."

"Do you mean she wishes to impose on him the yoke of matrimony?" Ransom asked, with Southern languor.

"I believe she thinks matrimony an exploded superstition; but there is here and there a case in which it is still the best thing; when the gentleman's name happens to be Burrage and the young lady's Tarrant. I don't admire 'Burrage' so much myself. But I think she would have captured this present scion if it hadn't been for Olive. Olive stands between them—she wants to keep her in the single sisterhood; to keep her, above all, for herself. Of

course she won't listen to her marrying, and she has put a spoke in the wheel. She has brought her to New York ; that may seem against what I say ; but the girl pulls hard, she has to humour her, to give her her head sometimes, to throw something overboard, in short, to save the rest. You may say, as regards Mr. Burrage, that it's a queer taste in a gentleman ; but there is no arguing about that. It's queer taste in a lady, too ; for she is a lady, poor Olive. You can see that to-night. She is dressed like a book-agent, but she is more distinguished than any one here. Verena, beside her, looks like a walking advertisement."

When Mrs. Luna paused, Basil Ransom became aware that, in the other room, Verena's address had begun ; the sound of her clear, bright, ringing voice, an admirable voice for public uses, came to them from the distance. His eagerness to stand where he could hear her better, and see her into the bargain, made him start in his place, and this movement produced an outgush of mocking laughter on the part of his companion. But she didn't say—" Go, go, ~~deluded man~~, I take pity on you ! " she only remarked, with light impertinence, that he surely wouldn't be so wanting in gallantry as to leave a lady absolutely alone in a public place—it was so Mrs. Luna was pleased to qualify Mrs. Burrage's drawing-room—in the face of her entreaty that he would remain with her. She had the better of poor Ransom, thanks to the superstitions of Mississippi. It was in his simple code a gross rudeness to withdraw from conversation with a lady at a party before another gentleman should have come to take one's place ; it was to inflict on the lady a kind of outrage. The other gentlemen, at Mrs. Burrage's, were all too well occupied ; there was not the smallest chance of one of them coming to his rescue. He couldn't

leave Mrs. Luna, and yet he couldn't stay with her and lose the only thing he had come so much out of his way for. "Let me at least find you a place over there, in the doorway. You can stand upon a chair —you can lean on me."

"Thank you very much; I would much rather lean on this sofa. And I am much too tired to stand on chairs. Besides, I wouldn't for the world that either Verena or Olive should see me craning over the heads of the crowd—as if I attached the smallest importance to their perorations!"

"It isn't time for the peroration yet," Ransom said, with savage dryness; and he sat forward, with his elbow on his knees, his eyes on the ground, a flush in his sallow cheek.

"It's never time to say such things as those," Mrs. Luna remarked, arranging her laces.

"How do you know what she is saying?"

"I can tell by the way her voice goes up and down. It sounds so silly."

Ransom sat there five minutes longer—minutes which, he felt, the recording angel ought to write down to his credit—and asked himself how Mrs. Luna could be such a goose as not to see that she was making him hate her. But she was goose enough for anything. He tried to appear indifferent, and it occurred to him to doubt whether the Mississippi system could be right, after all. It certainly hadn't foreseen such a case as this. "It's as plain as day that Mr. Burrage intends to marry her—if he can," he said in a minute; that remark being better calculated than any other he could think of to dissimulate his real state of mind.

It drew no rejoinder from his companion, and after an instant he turned his head a little and glanced at her. The result of something that silently passed between them was to make her say, abruptly: "Mr.

Ransom, my sister never sent you an invitation to this place. Didn't it come from Verena Tarrant ? "

" I haven't the least idea."

" As you hadn't the least acquaintance with Mrs. Burrage, who else could it have come from ? "

" If it came from Miss Tarrant, I ought at least to recognise her courtesy by listening to her."

" If you rise from this sofa I will tell Olive what I suspect. She will be perfectly capable of carrying Verena off to China—or anywhere out of your reach."

" And pray what is it you suspect ? "

" That you two have been in correspondence."

" Tell her whatever you like, Mrs. Luna," said the young man, with the grimness of resignation.

" You are quite unable to deny it, I see."

" I never contradict a lady."

" We shall see if I can't make you tell a fib. Haven't you been seeing Miss Tarrant, too ? "

" Where should I have seen her ? I can't see all the way to Boston, as you said the other day."

" Haven't you been there—on secret visits ? "

Ransom started just perceptibly ; but to conceal it, the next instant, he stood up.

" They wouldn't be secret if I were to tell you."

Looking down at her he saw that her words were a happy hit, not the result of definite knowledge. But she appeared to him vain, egotistical, grasping, odious.

" Well, I shall give the alarm," she went on ; " that is, I will if you leave me. Is that the way a Southern gentleman treats a lady ? Do as I wish, and I will let you off ! "

" You won't let me off from staying with you."

" Is it such a *corvée* ? I never heard of such rudeness ! " Mrs. Luna cried. " All the same, I am determined to keep you if I can ! "

Ransom felt that she must be in the wrong, and yet superficially she seemed (and it was quite intoler-

able) to have right on her side. All this while Verena's golden voice, with her words indistinct, solicited, tantalised his ear. The question had evidently got on Mrs. Luna's nerves; she had reached that point of feminine embroilment when a woman is perverse for the sake of perversity, and even with a clear vision of bad consequences.

"You have lost your head," he relieved himself by saying, as he looked down at her.

"I wish you would go and get me some tea."

"You say that only to embarrass me." He had hardly spoken when a great sound of applause, the clapping of many hands, and the cry from fifty throats of "Brava, brava!" floated in and died away. All Ransom's pulses throbbed, he flung his scruples to the winds, and after remarking to Mrs. Luna—still with all due ceremony—that he feared he must resign himself to forfeiting her good opinion, turned his back upon her and strode away to the open door of the music-room. "Well, I have never been so insulted!" he heard her exclaim, with exceeding sharpness, as he left her; and, glancing back at her, as he took up his position, he saw her still seated on her sofa—alone in the lamp-lit desert—with her eyes making, across the empty space, little vindictive points. Well, she could come where he was, if she wanted him so much; he would support her on an ottoman, and make it easy for her to see. But Mrs. Luna was uncompromising; he became aware, after a minute, that she had withdrawn, majestically, from the place, and he did not see her again that evening.

XXVIII

He could command the music-room very well from where he stood, behind a thick outer fringe of intently listening men. Verena Tarrant was erect on her little platform, dressed in white, with flowers in her bosom. The red cloth beneath her feet looked rich in the light of lamps placed on high pedestals on either side of the stage; it gave her figure a setting of colour which made it more pure and salient. She moved freely in her exposed isolation, yet with great sobriety of gesture; there was no table in front of her, and she had no notes in her hand, but stood there like an actress before the footlights, or a singer spinning vocal sounds to a silver thread. There was such a risk that a slim provincial girl, pretending to fascinate a couple of hundred *blasé* New Yorkers by simply giving them her ideas, would fail of her effect, that at the end of a few moments Basil Ransom became aware that he was watching her in very much the same excited way as if she had been performing, high above his head, on the trapeze. Yet, as one listened, it was impossible not to perceive that she was in perfect possession of her faculties, her subject, her audience; and he remembered the other time at Miss Birdseye's well enough to be able to measure the ground she had travelled since then. This exhibition was much more complete, her manner much more assured; she

seemed to speak and survey the whole place from a much greater height. Her voice, too, had developed; he had forgotten how beautiful it could be when she raised it to its full capacity. Such a tone as that, so pure and rich, and yet so young, so natural, constituted in itself a talent; he didn't wonder that they had made a fuss about her at the Female Convention, if she filled their hideous hall with such a music. He had read, of old, of the *improvisatrice* of Italy, and this was a chastened, modern, American version of the type, a New England Corinna, with a mission instead of a lyre. The most graceful part of her was her earnestness, the way her delightful eyes, wandering over the "fashionable audience" (before which she was so perfectly unabashed), as if she wished to resolve it into a single sentient personality, seemed to say that the only thing in life she cared for was to put the truth into a form that would render conviction irresistible. She was as simple as she was charming, and there was not a glance or motion that did not seem part of the pure, still-burning passion that animated her. She had indeed—it was manifest—reduced the company to unanimity; their attention was anything but languid; they smiled back at her when she smiled; they were noiseless, motionless when she was solemn; and it was evident that the entertainment which Mrs. Burrage had had the happy thought of offering to her friends would be memorable in the annals of the Wednesday Club. It was agreeable to Basil Ransom to think that Verena noticed him in his corner; her eyes played over her listeners so freely that you couldn't say they rested in one place more than another; nevertheless, a single rapid ray, which, however, didn't in the least strike him as a deviation from her ridiculous, fantastic, delightful argument, let him know that he had been missed and now was par-

ticularly spoken to. This glance was a sufficient assurance that his invitation had come to him by the girl's request. He took for granted the matter of her speech was ridiculous; how could it help being, and what did it signify if it was? She was none the less charming for that, and the moonshine she had been plied with was none the less moonshine for her being charming. After he had stood there a quarter of an hour he became conscious that he should not be able to repeat a word she had said; he had not definitely heeded it, and yet he had not lost a vibration of her voice. He had discovered Olive Chancellor by this time; she was in the front row of chairs, at the end, on the left; her back was turned to him, but he could see half her sharp profile, bent down a little and absolutely motionless. Even across the wide interval her attitude expressed to him a kind of rapturous stillness, the concentration of triumph. There were several irrepressible effusions of applause, instantly self-checked, but Olive never looked up, at the loudest, and such a calmness as that could only be the result of passionate volition. Success was in the air, and she was tasting it; she tasted it, as she did everything, in a way of her own. Success for Verena was success for her, and Ransom was sure that the only thing wanting to her triumph was that he should have been placed in the line of her vision, so that she might enjoy his embarrassment and confusion, might say to him, in one of her dumb, cold flashes—"*Now* do you think our movement is not a force—*now* do you think that women are meant to be slaves?" Honestly, he was not conscious of any confusion; it subverted none of his heresies to perceive that Verena Tarrant had even more power to fix his attention than he had hitherto supposed. It was fixed in a way it had not been yet, however, by his at last understanding her speech, feeling it

reach his inner sense through the impediment of mere dazzled vision. Certain phrases took on a meaning for him—an appeal she was making to those who still resisted the beneficent influence of the truth. They appeared to be mocking, cynical men, mainly; many of whom were such triflers and idlers, so heartless and brainless that it didn't matter much what they thought on any subject; if the old tyranny needed to be propped up by *them* it showed it was in a pretty bad way. But there were others whose prejudice was stronger and more cultivated, pretended to rest upon study and argument. To those she wished particularly to address herself; she wanted to waylay them, to say, "Look here, you're all wrong; you'll be so much happier when I have convinced you. Just give me five minutes," she should like to say; "just sit down here and let me ask a simple question. Do you think any state of society can come to good that is based upon an organised wrong?" That was the simple question that Verena desired to propound, and Basil smiled across the room at her with an amused tenderness as he gathered that she conceived it to be a poser. He didn't think it would frighten him much if she were to ask him that, and he would sit down with her for as many minutes as she liked.

He, of course, was one of the systematic scoffers, one of those to whom she said—"Do you know how you strike me? You strike me as men who are starving to death while they have a cupboard at home, all full of bread and meat and wine; or as blind, demented beings who let themselves be cast into a debtor's prison, while in their pocket they have the key of vaults and treasure-chests heaped up with gold and silver. The meat and wine, the gold and silver," Verena went on, "are

simply the suppressed and wasted force, the precious sovereign remedy, of which society insanely deprives itself—the genius, the intelligence, the inspiration of women. It is dying, inch by inch, in the midst of old superstitions which it invokes in vain, and yet it has the elixir of life in its hands. Let it drink but a draught, and it will bloom once more; it will be refreshed, radiant; it will find its youth again. The heart, the heart is cold, and nothing but the touch of woman can warm it, make it act. We *are* the Heart of humanity, and let us have the courage to insist on it! The public life of the world will move in the same barren, mechanical, vicious circle—the circle of egotism, cruelty, ferocity, jealousy, greed, of blind striving to do things only for *some*, at the cost of others, instead of trying to do everything for all. All, all? Who dares to say 'all' when we are not there? We are an equal, a splendid, an inestimable part. Try us and you'll see—you will wonder how, without us, society has ever dragged itself even this distance—so wretchedly small compared with what it might have been—on its painful earthly pilgrimage. That is what I should like above all to pour into the ears of those who still hold out, who stiffen their necks and repeat hard, empty formulas, which are as dry as a broken gourd that has been flung away in the desert. I would take them by their selfishness, their indolence, their interest. I am not here to recriminate, nor to deepen the gulf that already yawns between the sexes, and I don't accept the doctrine that they are natural enemies, since my plea is for a union far more intimate—provided it be equal—than any that the sages and philosophers of former times have ever dreamed of. Therefore I shall not touch upon the subject of men's being most easily influenced by considerations of what is most agreeable and profitable

for *them*; I shall simply assume that they *are* so influenced, and I shall say to them that our cause would long ago have been gained if their vision were not so dim, so veiled, even in matters in which their own interests are concerned. If they had the same quick sight as women, if they had the intelligence of the heart, the world would be very different now; and I assure you that half the bitterness of our lot is to see so clearly and not to be able to do! Good gentlemen all, if I could make you believe how much brighter and fairer and sweeter the garden of life would be for you, if you would only let us help you to keep it in order! You would like so much better to walk there, and you would find grass and trees and flowers that would make you think you were in Eden. That is what I should like to press home to each of you, personally, individually—to give him the vision of the world as it hangs perpetually before me, redeemed, transfigured, by a new moral tone. There would be generosity, tenderness, sympathy, where there is now only brute force and sordid rivalry. But you really do strike me as stupid even about your own welfare! Some of you say that we have already all the influence we can possibly require, and talk as if we ought to be grateful that we are allowed even to breathe. Pray, who shall judge what we require if not we ourselves? We require simply freedom; we require the lid to be taken off the box in which we have been kept for centuries. You say it's a very comfortable, cozy, convenient box, with nice glass sides, so that we can see out, and that all that's wanted is to give another quiet turn to the key. That is very easily answered. Good gentlemen, you have never been in the box, and you haven't the least idea how it feels!"

The historian who has gathered these documents together does not deem it necessary to give a larger

specimen of Verena's eloquence, especially as Basil Ransom, through whose ears we are listening to it, arrived, at this point, at a definite conclusion. He had taken her measure as a public speaker, judged her importance in the field of discussion, the cause of reform. Her speech, in itself, had about the value of a pretty essay, committed to memory and delivered by a bright girl at an "academy"; it was vague, thin, rambling, a tissue of generalities that glittered agreeably enough in Mrs. Burrage's veiled lamplight. From any serious point of view it was neither worth answering nor worth considering, and Basil Ransom made his reflexions on the crazy character of the age in which such a performance as that was treated as an intellectual effort, a contribution to a question. He asked himself what either he or any one else would think of it if Miss Chancellor —or even Mrs. Luna—had been on the platform instead of the actual declaimer. Nevertheless, its importance was high, and consisted precisely, in part, of the fact that the voice was not the voice of Olive or of Adeline. Its importance was that Verena was unspeakably attractive, and this was all the greater for him in the light of the fact, which quietly dawned upon him as he stood there, that he was falling in love with her. It had tapped at his heart for recognition, and before he could hesitate or challenge, the door had sprung open and the mansion was illuminated. He gave no outward sign; he stood gazing as at a picture; but the room wavered before his eyes, even Verena's figure danced a little. This did not make the sequel of her discourse more clear to him; her meaning faded again into the agreeable vague, and he simply felt her presence, tasted her voice. Yet the act of reflexion was not suspended; he found himself rejoicing that she was so weak in argument, so inevitably verbose. The idea that she was brilliant,

that she counted as a factor only because the public mind was in a muddle, was not an humiliation but a delight to him ; it was a proof that her apostleship was all nonsense, the most passing of fashions, the veriest of delusions, and that she was meant for something divinely different—for privacy, for him, for love. He took no measure of the duration of her talk ; he only knew, when it was over and succeeded by a clapping of hands, an immense buzz of voices and shuffling of chairs, that it had been capitally bad, and that her personal success, wrapping it about with a glamour like the silver mist that surrounds a fountain, was such as to prevent its badness from being a cause of mortification to her lover. The company—such of it as did not immediately close together around Verena—filed away into the other rooms, bore him in its current into the neighbourhood of a table spread for supper, where he looked for signs of the sumptuary law mentioned to him by Mrs. Luna. It appeared to be embodied mainly in the glitter of crystal and silver, and the fresh tints of mysterious viands and jellies, which looked desirable in the soft circle projected by lace-fringed lamps. He heard the popping of corks, he felt a pressure of elbows, a thickening of the crowd, perceived that he was glowered at, squeezed against the table, by contending gentlemen who observed that he usurped space, was neither feeding himself nor helping others to feed. He had lost sight of Verena ; she had been borne away in clouds of compliment ; but he found himself thinking—almost paternally—that she must be hungry after so much chatter, and he hoped some one was getting her something to eat. After a moment, just as he was edging away, for his own opportunity to sup much better than usual was not what was uppermost in his mind, this little vision was suddenly embodied—embodied by

the appearance of Miss Tarrant, who faced him, in the press, attached to the arm of a young man now recognisable to him as the son of the house—the smiling, fragrant youth who an hour before had interrupted his colloquy with Olive. He was leading her to the table, while people made way for them, covering Verena with gratulations of word and look. Ransom could see that, according to a phrase which came back to him just then, oddly, out of some novel or poem he had read of old, she was the cynosure of every eye. She looked beautiful, and they were a beautiful couple. As soon as she saw him, she put out her left hand to him—the other was in Mr. Burrage's arm—and said: "Well, don't you think it's all true?"

"No, not a word of it!" Ransom answered, with a kind of joyous sincerity. "But it doesn't make any difference."

"Oh, it makes a great deal of difference to me!" Verena cried.

"I mean to me. I don't care in the least whether I agree with you," Ransom said, looking askance at young Mr. Burrage, who had detached himself and was getting something for Verena to eat.

"Ah, well, if you are so indifferent!"

"It's not because I'm indifferent!" His eyes came back to her own, the expression of which had changed before they quitted them. She began to complain to her companion, who brought her something very dainty on a plate, that Mr. Ransom was "standing out," that he was about the hardest subject she had encountered yet. Henry Burrage smiled upon Ransom in a way that was meant to show he remembered having already spoken to him, while the Mississippian said to himself that there was nothing on the face of it to make it strange there should be between these fair, successful young persons some

such question of love or marriage as Mrs. Luna had tattled about. Mr. Burrage was successful, he could see that in the turn of an eye; not perhaps as having a commanding intellect or a very strong character, but as being rich, polite, handsome, happy, amiable, and as wearing a splendid camellia in his buttonhole. And that *he*, at any rate, thought Verena had succeeded was proved by the casual, civil tone, and the contented distraction of eye, with which he exclaimed, "You don't mean to say you were not moved by that! It's my opinion that Miss Tarrant will carry everything before her." He was so pleased himself, and so safe in his conviction, that it didn't matter to him what any one else thought; which was, after all, just Basil Ransom's own state of mind.

"Oh! I didn't say I wasn't moved," the Mississippian remarked.

"Moved the wrong way!" said Verena. "Never mind; you'll be left behind."

"If I am, you will come back to console me."

"*Back?* I shall never come back!" the girl replied gaily.

"You'll be the very first!" Ransom went on, feeling himself now, and as if by a sudden clearing up of his spiritual atmosphere, no longer in the vein for making the concessions of chivalry, and yet conscious that his words were an expression of homage.

"Oh, I call that presumptuous!" Mr. Burrage exclaimed, turning away to get a glass of water for Verena, who had refused to accept champagne, mentioning that she had never drunk any in her life and that she associated a kind of iniquity with it. Olive had no wine in her house (not that Verena gave this explanation) but her father's old madeira and a little claret; of the former of which liquors Basil

Ransom had highly approved the day he dined with her.

"Does he believe in all those lunacies?" he inquired, knowing perfectly what to think about the charge of presumption brought by Mr. Burrage.

"Why, he's crazy about our movement," Verena responded. "He's one of my most gratifying converts."

"And don't you despise him for it?"

"Despise him? Why, you seem to think I swing round pretty often!"

"Well, I have an idea that I shall see you swing round yet," Ransom remarked, in a tone in which it would have appeared to Henry Burrage, had he heard these words, that presumption was pushed to fatuity.

On Verena, however, they produced no impression that prevented her from saying simply, without the least rancour, "Well, if you expect to draw me back five hundred years, I hope you won't tell Miss Birdseye." And as Ransom did not seize immediately the reason of her allusion, she went on, "You know she is convinced it will be just the other way. I went to see her after you had been at Cambridge—almost immediately."

"Darling old lady—I hope she's well," the young man said.

"Well, she's tremendously interested."

"She's always interested in something, isn't she?"

"Well, this time it's in our relations, yours and mine," Verena replied, in a tone in which only Verena could say a thing like that. "You ought to see how she throws herself into them. She is sure it will all work round for your good."

"All what, Miss Tarrant?" Ransom asked.

"Well, what I told her. She is sure you are going to become one of our leaders, that you are very gifted

for treating great questions and acting on masses of people, that you will become quite enthusiastic about our uprising, and that when you go up to the top as one of our champions it will all have been through me."

Ransom stood there, smiling at her; the dusky glow in his eyes expressed a softness representing no prevision of such laurels, but which testified none the less to Verena's influence. "And what you want is that I shouldn't undeceive her?"

"Well, I don't want you to be hypocritical—if you shouldn't take our side; but I do think that it would be sweet if the dear old thing could just cling to her illusion. She won't live so very long, probably; she told me the other day she was ready for her final rest; so it wouldn't interfere much with your freedom. She feels quite romantic about it—your being a Southerner and all, and not naturally in sympathy with Boston ideas, and your meeting her that way in the street and making yourself known to her. She won't believe but what I shall move you."

"Don't fear, Miss Tarrant, she shall be satisfied," Ransom said, with a laugh which he could see she but partially understood. He was prevented from making his meaning more clear by the return of Mr. Burrage, bringing not only Verena's glass of water but a smooth-faced, rosy, smiling old gentleman, who had a velvet waistcoat, and thin white hair, brushed effectively, and whom he introduced to Verena under a name which Ransom recognised as that of a rich and venerable citizen, conspicuous for his public spirit and his large almsgiving. Ransom had lived long enough in New York to know that a request from this ancient worthy to be made known to Miss Tarrant would mark her for the approval of the respectable, stamp her as a success of no vulgar sort; and as he turned away, a faint, inaudible sigh passed his lips, dictated by the sense that he himself

belonged to a terribly small and obscure minority. He turned away because, as we know, he had been taught that a gentleman talking to a lady must always do that when a new gentleman is presented; though he observed, looking back, after a minute, that young Mr. Burrage evidently had no intention of abdicating in favour of the eminent philanthropist. He thought he had better go home; he didn't know what might happen at such a party as that, nor when the proceedings might be supposed to terminate; but after considering it a minute he dismissed the idea that there was a chance of Verena's speaking again. If he was a little vague about this, however, there was no doubt in his mind as to the obligation he was under to take leave first of Mrs. Burrage. He wished he knew where Verena was staying; he wanted to see her alone, not in a supper-room crowded with millionaires. As he looked about for the hostess it occurred to him that she would know, and that if he were able to quench a certain shyness sufficiently to ask her, she would tell him. Having satisfied himself presently that she was not in the supper-room, he made his way back to the parlours, where the company now was much diminished. He looked again into the music-room, tenanted only by half-a-dozen couples, who were cultivating privacy among the empty chairs, and here he perceived Mrs. Burrage sitting in conversation with Olive Chancellor (the latter, apparently, had not moved from her place), before the deserted scene of Verena's triumph. His search had been so little for Olive that at the sight of her he faltered a moment; then he pulled himself together, advancing with a consciousness of the Mississippi manner. He felt Olive's eyes receiving him; she looked at him as if it was just the hope that she shouldn't meet him again that had made her remain where she was. Mrs. Burrage got up, as

he bade her good-night, and Olive followed her example.

"So glad you were able to come. Wonderful creature, isn't she? She can do anything she wants."

These words from the elder lady Ransom received at first with a reserve which, as he trusted, suggested extreme respect; and it was a fact that his silence had a kind of Southern solemnity in it. Then he said, in a tone equally expressive of great deliberation:

"Yes, madam, I think I never was present at an exhibition, an entertainment of any kind, which held me more completely under the charm."

"Delighted you liked it. I didn't know what in the world to have, and this has proved an inspiration —for me as well as for Miss Tarrant. Miss Chancellor has been telling me how they have worked together; it's really quite beautiful. Miss Chancellor is Miss Tarrant's great friend and colleague. Miss Tarrant assures me that she couldn't do anything without her." After which explanation, turning to Olive, Mrs. Burrage murmured: "Let me introduce Mr. —— introduce Mr. ——"

But she had forgotten poor Ransom's name, forgotten who had asked her for a card for him; and, perceiving it, he came to her rescue with the observation that he was a kind of cousin of Miss Olive's, if she didn't repudiate him, and that he knew what a tremendous partnership existed between the two young ladies. "When I applauded I was applauding the firm—that is, you too," he said, smiling, to his kinswoman.

"Your applause? I confess I don't understand it," Olive replied, with much promptitude.

"Well, to tell the truth, I didn't myself!"

"Oh yes, of course, I know; that's why—that's why——" And this further speech of Mrs. Burrage's, in reference to the relationship between the young man and her companion, faded also into vagueness.

She had been on the point of saying it was the reason why he was in her house; but she had bethought herself in time that this ought to pass as a matter of course. Basil Ransom could see she was a woman who could carry off an awkwardness like that, and he considered her with a sense of her importance. She had a brisk, familiar, slightly impatient way, and if she had not spoken so fast, and had more of the softness of the Southern matron, she would have reminded him of a certain type of woman he had seen of old, before the changes in his own part of the world—the clever, capable, hospitable proprietress, widowed or unmarried, of a big plantation carried on by herself. "If you are her cousin, do take Miss Chancellor to have some supper—instead of going away," she went on, with her infelicitous readiness.

At this Olive instantly seated herself again.

"I am much obliged to you; I never touch supper. I shall not leave this room—I like it."

"Then let me send you something—or let Mr. ——, your cousin, remain with you."

Olive looked at Mrs. Burrage with a strange beseechingness, "I am very tired, I must rest. These occasions leave me exhausted."

"Ah yes, I can imagine that. Well, then, you shall be quite quiet—I shall come back to you." And with a smile of farewell for Basil Ransom, Mrs. Burrage moved away.

Basil lingered a moment, though he saw that Olive wished to get rid of him. "I won't disturb you further than to ask you a single question," he said. "Where are you staying? I want to come and see Miss Tarrant. I don't say I want to come and see you, because I have an idea that it would give you no pleasure." It had occurred to him that he might obtain their address from Mrs. Luna—he only knew vaguely it was Tenth Street; much as

he had displeased her she couldn't refuse him that; but suddenly the greater simplicity and frankness of applying directly to Olive, even at the risk of appearing to brave her, recommended itself. He couldn't, of course, call upon Verena without her knowing it, and she might as well make her protest (since he proposed to pay no heed to it) sooner as later. He had seen nothing, personally, of their life together, but it had come over him that what Miss Chancellor most disliked in him (had she not, on the very threshold of their acquaintance, had a sort of mystical foreboding of it?) was the possibility that he would interfere. It was quite on the cards that he might; yet it was decent, all the same, to ask her rather than any one else. It was better that his interference should be accompanied with all the forms of chivalry.

Olive took no notice of his remark as to how she herself might be affected by his visit; but she asked in a moment why he should think it necessary to call on Miss Tarrant. "You know you are not in sympathy," she added, in a tone which contained a really touching element of entreaty that he would not even pretend to prove he was.

I know not whether Basil was touched, but he said, with every appearance of a conciliatory purpose—"I wish to thank her for all the interesting information she has given me this evening."

"If you think it generous to come and scoff at her, of course she has no defence; you will be glad to know that."

"Dear Miss Chancellor, if you are not a defence—a battery of many guns!" Ransom exclaimed.

"Well, she at least is not mine!" Olive returned, springing to her feet. She looked round her as if she were really pressed too hard, panting like a hunted creature.

"Your defence is your certain immunity from attack. Perhaps if you won't tell me where you are staying, you will kindly ask Miss Tarrant herself to do so. Would she send me a word on a card?"

"We are in West Tenth Street," Olive said; and she gave the number. "Of course you are free to come."

"Of course I am! Why shouldn't I be? But I am greatly obliged to you for the information. I will ask her to come out, so that you won't see us." And he turned away, with the sense that it was really insufferable, her attempt always to give him the air of being in the wrong. If that was the kind of spirit in which women were going to act when they had more power!

XXIX

MRS. LUNA was early in the field the next day, and her sister wondered to what she owed the honour of a visit from her at eleven o'clock in the morning. She very soon saw, when Adeline asked her whether it had been she who procured for Basil Ransom an invitation to Mrs. Burrage's.

"Me—why in the world should it have been me?" Olive asked, feeling something of a pang at the implication that it had not been Adeline, as she supposed.

"I didn't know—but you took him up so."

"Why, Adeline Luna, when did I ever——?" Miss Chancellor exclaimed, staring and intensely grave.

"You don't mean to say you have forgotten how you brought him on to see you, a year and a half ago!"

"I didn't bring him on—I said if he happened to be there."

"Yes, I remember how it was: he did happen, and then you happened to hate him, and tried to get out of it."

Miss Chancellor saw, I say, why Adeline had come to her at the hour she knew she was always writing letters, after having given her all the attention that was necessary the day before; she had come simply to make herself disagreeable, as Olive knew, of old, the spirit sometimes moved her irresistibly to do. It seemed to her that Adeline had been

disagreeable enough in not having beguiled Basil Ransom into a marriage, according to that memorable calculation of probabilities in which she indulged (with a licence that she scarcely liked definitely to recall) when the pair made acquaintance under her eyes in Charles Street, and Mrs. Luna seemed to take to him as much as she herself did little. She would gladly have accepted him as a brother-in-law, for the harm such a relation could do one was limited and definite; whereas in his general capacity of being at large in her life the ability of the young Mississippian to injure her seemed somehow immense. "I wrote to him—that time—for a perfectly definite reason," she said. "I thought mother would have liked us to know him. But it was a mistake."

"How do you know it was a mistake? Mother would have liked him, I daresay."

"I mean my acting as I did; it was a theory of duty which I allowed to press me too much. I always do. Duty should be obvious; one shouldn't hunt round for it."

"Was it very obvious when it brought you on here?" asked Mrs. Luna, who was distinctly out of humour.

Olive looked for a moment at the toe of her shoe. "I had an idea that you would have married him by this time," she presently remarked.

"Marry him yourself, my dear! What put such an idea into your head?"

"You wrote to me at first so much about him. You told me he was tremendously attentive, and that you liked him."

"His state of mind is one thing and mine is another. How can I marry every man that hangs about me—that dogs my footsteps? I might as well become a Mormon at once!" Mrs. Luna delivered herself of this argument with a certain charitable air,

as if her sister could not be expected to understand such a situation by her own light.

Olive waived the discussion, and simply said: "I took for granted *you* had got him the invitation."

"I, my dear? That would be quite at variance with my attitude of discouragement."

"Then she simply sent it herself."

"Whom do you mean by 'she'?"

"Mrs. Burrage, of course."

"I thought that you might mean Verena," said Mrs. Luna casually.

"Verena—to him? Why in the world——?" And Olive gave the cold glare with which her sister was familiar.

"Why in the world not—since she knows him?"

"She had seen him twice in her life before last night, when she met him for the third time and spoke to him."

"Did she tell you that?"

"She tells me everything."

"Are you very sure?"

"Adeline Luna, what *do* you mean?" Miss Chancellor murmured.

"Are you very sure that last night was only the third time?" Mrs. Luna went on.

Olive threw back her head and swept her sister from her bonnet to her lowest flounce. "You have no right to hint at such a thing as that unless you know!"

"Oh, I know—I know, at any rate, more than you do!" And then Mrs. Luna, sitting with her sister, much withdrawn, in one of the windows of the big, hot, faded parlour of the boarding-house in Tenth Street, where there was a rug before the chimney representing a Newfoundland dog saving a child from drowning, and a row of chromo-lithographs on the walls, imparted to her the impression

she had received the evening before—the impression of Basil Ransom's keen curiosity about Verena Tarrant. Verena must have asked Mrs. Burrage to send him a card, and asked it without mentioning the fact to Olive—for wouldn't Olive certainly have remembered it? It was no use her saying that Mrs. Burrage might have sent it of her own movement, because she wasn't aware of his existence, and why should she be? Basil Ransom himself had told her he didn't know Mrs. Burrage. Mrs. Luna knew whom he knew and whom he didn't, or at least the sort of people, and they were not the sort that belonged to the Wednesday Club. That was one reason why she didn't care about him for any intimate relation—that he didn't seem to have any taste for making nice friends. Olive would know what *her* taste was in this respect, though it wasn't that young woman's own any more than his. It was positive that the suggestion about the card could only have come from Verena. At any rate Olive could easily ask, or if she was afraid of her telling a fib she could ask Mrs. Burrage. It was true Mrs. Burrage might have been put on her guard by Verena, and would perhaps invent some other account of the matter; therefore Olive had better just believe what *she* believed, that Verena had secured his presence at the party and had had private reasons for doing so. It is to be feared that Ransom's remark to Mrs. Luna the night before about her having lost her head was near to the mark; for if she had not been blinded by her rancour she would have guessed the horror with which she inspired her sister when she spoke in that off-hand way of Verena's lying and Mrs. Burrage's lying. Did people lie like that in Mrs. Luna's set? It was Olive's plan of life not to lie, and attributing a similar disposition to people she liked, it was impossible for her to believe that Verena had had the intention of

deceiving her. Mrs. Luna, in a calmer hour, might also have divined that Olive would make her private comments on the strange story of Basil Ransom's having made up to Verena out of pique at Adeline's rebuff; for this was the account of the matter that she now offered to Miss Chancellor. Olive did two things: she listened intently and eagerly, judging there was distinct danger in the air (which, however, she had not wanted Mrs. Luna to tell her, having perceived it for herself the night before); and she saw that poor Adeline was fabricating fearfully, that the "rebuff" was altogether an invention. Mr. Ransom was evidently preoccupied with Verena, but he had not needed Mrs. Luna's cruelty to make him so. So Olive maintained an attitude of great reserve; she did not take upon herself to announce that her own version was that Adeline, for reasons absolutely imperceptible to others, had tried to catch Basil Ransom, had failed in her attempt, and, furious at seeing Verena preferred to a person of her importance (Olive remembered the *spretae injuria formae*), now wished to do both him and the girl an ill turn. This would be accomplished if she could induce Olive to interfere. Miss Chancellor was conscious of an abundant readiness to interfere, but it was not because she cared for Adeline's mortification. I am not sure, even, that she did not think her *fiasco* but another illustration of her sister's general uselessness, and rather despise her for it; being perfectly able at once to hold that nothing is baser than the effort to entrap a man, and to think it very ignoble to have to renounce it because you can't. Olive kept these reflexions to herself, but she went so far as to say to her sister that she didn't see where the "pique" came in. How could it hurt Adeline that he should turn his attention to Verena? What was Verena to her?

" Why, Olive Chancellor, how can you ask? " Mrs. Luna boldly responded. " Isn't Verena everything to you, and aren't you everything to me, and wouldn't an attempt — a successful one — to take Verena away from you knock you up fearfully, and shouldn't I suffer, as you know I suffer, by sympathy? "

I have said that it was Miss Chancellor's plan of life not to lie, but such a plan was compatible with a kind of consideration for the truth which led her to shrink from producing it on poor occasions. So she didn't say, " Dear me, Adeline, what humbug! you know you hate Verena and would be very glad if she were drowned! " She only said, " Well, I see; but it's very roundabout." What she did see was that Mrs. Luna was eager to help her to stop off Basil Ransom from " making head," as the phrase was; and the fact that her motive was spite, and not tenderness for the Bostonians, would not make her assistance less welcome if the danger were real. She herself had a nervous dread, but she had that about everything; still, Adeline had perhaps seen something, and what in the world did she mean by her reference to Verena's having had secret meetings? When pressed on this point, Mrs. Luna could only say that she didn't pretend to give definite information, and she wasn't a spy anyway, but that the night before he had positively flaunted in her face his admiration for the girl, his enthusiasm for her way of standing up there. Of course he hated her ideas, but he was quite conceited enough to think she would give them up. Perhaps it was all directed at *her*—as if she cared! It would depend a good deal on the girl herself; certainly, if there was any likelihood of Verena's being affected, she should advise Olive to look out. She knew best what to do; it was only Adeline's duty to give her the benefit of her own impression, whether she was thanked for it

or not. She only wished to put her on her guard, and it was just like Olive to receive such information so coldly; she was the most disappointing woman she knew.

Miss Chancellor's coldness was not diminished by this rebuke; for it had come over her that, after all, she had never opened herself at that rate to Adeline, had never let her see the real intensity of her desire to keep the sort of danger there was now a question of away from Verena, had given her no warrant for regarding her as her friend's keeper; so that she was taken aback by the flatness of Mrs. Luna's assumption that she was ready to enter into a conspiracy to circumvent and frustrate the girl. Olive put on all her majesty to dispel this impression, and if she could not help being aware that she made Mrs. Luna still angrier, on the whole, than at first, she felt that she would much rather disappoint her than give herself away to her—especially as she was intensely eager to profit by her warning!

XXX

Mrs. Luna would have been still less satisfied with the manner in which Olive received her proffered assistance had she known how many confidences that reticent young woman might have made her in return. Olive's whole life now was a matter for whispered communications; she felt this herself, as she sought the privacy of her own apartment after her interview with her sister. She had for the moment time to think; Verena having gone out with Mr. Burrage, who had made an appointment the night before to call for her to drive at that early hour. They had other engagements in the afternoon—the principal of which was to meet a group of earnest people at the house of one of the great local promoters. Olive would whisk Verena off to these appointments directly after lunch; she flattered herself that she could arrange matters so that there would not be half an hour in the day during which Basil Ransom, complacently calling, would find the Bostonians in the house. She had had this well in mind when, at Mrs. Burrage's, she was driven to give him their address; and she had had it also in mind that she would ask Verena, as a special favour, to accompany her back to Boston on the next day but one, which was the morning of the morrow. There had been considerable talk of her staying a few days with Mrs. Burrage —staying on after her own departure; but Verena

backed out of it spontaneously, seeing how the idea worried her friend. Olive had accepted the sacrifice, and their visit to New York was now cut down, in intention, to four days, one of which, the moment she perceived whither Basil Ransom was tending, Miss Chancellor promised herself also to suppress. She had not mentioned that to Verena yet; she hesitated a little, having a slightly bad conscience about the concessions she had already obtained from her friend. Verena made such concessions with a generosity which caused one's heart to ache for admiration, even while one asked for them; and never once had Olive known her to demand the smallest credit for any virtue she showed in this way, or to bargain for an instant about any effort she made to oblige. She had been delighted with the idea of spending a week under Mrs. Burrage's roof; she had said, too, that she believed her mother would die happy (not that there was the least prospect of Mrs. Tarrant's dying) if she could hear of her having such an experience as that; and yet, perceiving how solemn Olive looked about it, how she blanched and brooded at the prospect, she had offered to give it up, with a smile sweeter, if possible, than any that had ever sat in her eyes. Olive knew what that meant for her, knew what a power of enjoyment she still had, in spite of the tension of their common purpose, their vital work, which had now, as they equally felt, passed into the stage of realisation, of fruition; and that is why her conscience rather pricked her for consenting to this further act of renunciation, especially as their position seemed really so secure, on the part of one who had already given herself away so sublimely.

Secure as their position might be, Olive called herself a blind idiot for having, in spite of all her first shrinkings, agreed to bring Verena to New York.

Verena had jumped at the invitation, the very unexpectedness of which on Mrs. Burrage's part—it was such an odd idea to have come to a mere worldling —carried a kind of persuasion with it. Olive's immediate sentiment had been an instinctive general fear; but, later, she had dismissed that as unworthy; she had decided (and such a decision was nothing new) that where their mission was concerned they ought to face everything. Such an opportunity would contribute too much to Verena's reputation and authority to justify a refusal at the bidding of apprehensions which were after all only vague. Olive's specific terrors and dangers had by this time very much blown over; Basil Ransom had given no sign of life for ages, and Henry Burrage had certainly got his quietus before they went to Europe. If it had occurred to his mother that she might convert Verena into the animating principle of a big soiree, she was at least acting in good faith, for it could be no more her wish to-day that he should marry Selah Tarrant's daughter than it was her wish a year before. And then they should do some good to the benighted, the most benighted, the fashionable benighted; they should perhaps make them furious—there was always some good in that. Lastly, Olive was conscious of a personal temptation in the matter; she was not insensible to the pleasure of appearing in a distinguished New York circle as a representative woman, an important Bostonian, the prompter, colleague, associate of one of the most original girls of the time. Basil Ransom was the person she had least expected to meet at Mrs. Burrage's; it had been her belief that they might easily spend four days in a city of more than a million of inhabitants without that disagreeable accident. But it had occurred; nothing was wanting to make it seem serious; and, setting her teeth, she shook herself, morally, hard, for having

fallen into the trap of fate. Well, she would scramble out, with only a scare, probably. Henry Burrage was very attentive, but somehow she didn't fear him now; and it was only natural he should feel that he couldn't be polite enough, after they had consented to be exploited in that worldly way by his mother. The other danger was the worst; the palpitation of her strange dread, the night of Miss Birdseye's party, came back to her. Mr. Burrage seemed, indeed, a protection; she reflected, with relief, that it had been arranged that after taking Verena to drive in the Park and see the Museum of Art in the morning, they should in the evening dine with him at Delmonico's (he was to invite another gentleman), and go afterwards to the German opera. Olive had kept all this to herself, as I have said; revealing to her sister neither the vividness of her prevision that Basil Ransom would look blank when he came down to Tenth Street and learned they had flitted, nor the eagerness of her desire just to find herself once more in the Boston train. It had been only this prevision that sustained her when she gave Mr. Ransom their number.

Verena came to her room shortly before luncheon, to let her know she had returned; and while they sat there, waiting to stop their ears when the gong announcing the repast was beaten, at the foot of the stairs, by a negro in a white jacket, she narrated to her friend her adventures with Mr. Burrage—expatiated on the beauty of the park, the splendour and interest of the Museum, the wonder of the young man's acquaintance with everything it contained, the swiftness of his horses, the softness of his English cart, the pleasure of rolling at that pace over roads as firm as marble, the entertainment he promised them for the evening. Olive listened in serious silence; she saw Verena was quite carried away;

of course she hadn't gone so far with her without knowing that phase.

"Did Mr. Burrage try to make love to you?" Miss Chancellor inquired at last, without a smile.

Verena had taken off her hat to arrange her feather, and as she placed it on her head again, her uplifted arms making a frame for her face, she said: "Yes, I suppose it was meant for love."

Olive waited for her to tell more, to tell how she had treated him, kept him in his place, made him feel that that question was over long ago; but as Verena gave her no further information she did not insist, conscious as she always was that in such a relation as theirs there should be a great respect on either side for the liberty of each. She had never yet infringed on Verena's, and of course she wouldn't begin now. Moreover, with the request that she meant presently to make of her she felt that she must be discreet. She wondered whether Henry Burrage were really going to begin again; whether his mother had only been acting in his interest in getting them to come on. Certainly, the bright spot in such a prospect was that if she listened to him she couldn't listen to Basil Ransom; and he *had* told Olive herself last night, when he put them into their carriage, that he hoped to prove to her yet that he had come round to her gospel. But the old sickness stole upon her again, the faintness of discouragement, as she asked herself why in the name of pity Verena should listen to any one at all but Olive Chancellor. Again it came over her, when she saw the brightness, the happy look, the girl brought back, as it had done in the earlier months, that the great trouble was that weak spot of Verena's, that sole infirmity and subtle flaw, which she had expressed to her very soon after they began to live together, in saying (she remembered it through the ineffaceable impression

made by her friend's avowal), "I'll tell you what is the matter with you—you don't dislike men as a class!" Verena had replied on this occasion, "Well, no, I don't dislike them when they are pleasant!" As if organised atrociousness could ever be pleasant! Olive disliked them most when they were least unpleasant. After a little, at present, she remarked, referring to Henry Burrage: "It is not right of him, not decent, after your making him feel how, while he was at Cambridge, he wearied you, tormented you."

"Oh, I didn't show anything," said Verena gaily. "I am learning to dissimulate," she added in a moment. "I suppose you have to as you go along. I pretend not to notice."

At this moment the gong sounded for luncheon, and the two young women covered up their ears, face to face, Verena with her quick smile, Olive with her pale patience. When they could hear themselves speak, the latter said abruptly:

"How did Mrs. Burrage come to invite Mr. Ransom to her party? He told Adeline he had never seen her before."

"Oh, I asked her to send him an invitation—after she had written to me, to thank me, when it was definitely settled we should come on. She asked me in her letter if there were any friends of mine in the city to whom I should like her to send cards, and I mentioned Mr. Ransom."

Verena spoke without a single instant's hesitation, and the only sign of embarrassment she gave was that she got up from her chair, passing in this manner a little out of Olive's scrutiny. It was easy for her not to falter, because she was glad of the chance. She wanted to be very simple in all her relations with her friend, and of course it was not simple so soon as she began to keep things back. She could at any

rate keep back as little as possible, and she felt as if she were making up for a dereliction when she answered Olive's inquiry so promptly.

"You never told me of that," Miss Chancellor remarked, in a low tone.

"I didn't want to. I know you don't like him, and I thought it would give you pain. Yet I wanted him to be there—I wanted him to hear."

"What does it matter—why should you care about him?"

"Well, because he is so awfully opposed!"

"How do you know that, Verena?"

At this point Verena began to hesitate. It was not, after all, so easy to keep back only a little; it appeared rather as if one must either tell everything or hide everything. The former course had already presented itself to her as unduly harsh; it was because it seemed so that she had ended by keeping the incident of Basil Ransom's visit to Monadnoc Place buried in unspoken, in unspeakable, considerations, the only secret she had in the world—the only thing that was all her own. She was so glad to say what she could without betraying herself that it was only after she had spoken that she perceived there was a danger of Olive's pushing the inquiry to the point where, to defend herself as it were, she should be obliged to practise a positive deception; and she was conscious at the same time that the moment her secret was threatened it became dearer to her. She began to pray silently that Olive might not push; for it would be odious, it would be impossible, to defend herself by a lie. Meanwhile, however, she had to answer, and the way she answered was by exclaiming, much more quickly than the reflexions I note might have appeared to permit, "Well, if you can't tell from his appearance! He's the type of the reactionary."

Verena went to the toilet-glass to see that she had put on her hat properly, and Olive slowly got up, in the manner of a person not in the least eager for food. "Let him react as he likes—for heaven's sake don't mind him!" That was Miss Chancellor's rejoinder, and Verena felt that it didn't say all that was in her mind. She wished she would come down to luncheon, for she, at least, was honestly hungry. She even suspected Olive had an idea she was afraid to express, such distress it would bring with it. "Well, you know, Verena, this isn't our *real* life—it isn't our work," Olive went on.

"Well, no, it isn't, certainly," said Verena, not pretending at first that she did not know what Olive meant. In a moment, however, she added, "Do you refer to this social intercourse with Mr. Burrage?"

"Not to that only." Then Olive asked abruptly, looking at her, "How did you know his address?"

"His address?"

"Mr. Ransom's—to enable Mrs. Burrage to invite him?"

They stood for a moment interchanging a gaze. "It was in a letter I got from him."

At these words there came into Olive's face an expression which made her companion cross over to her directly and take her by the hand. But the tone was different from what Verena expected, when she said, with cold surprise: "Oh, you are in correspondence!" It showed an immense effort of self-control.

"He wrote to me once—I never told you," Verena rejoined, smiling. She felt that her friend's strange, uneasy eyes searched very far; a little more and they would go to the very bottom. Well, they might go if they would; she didn't, after all, care so much about her secret as that. For the moment, however, Verena did not learn what Olive had discovered, inasmuch as she only remarked presently that it

was really time to go down. As they descended the staircase she put her arm into Miss Chancellor's and perceived that she was trembling.

Of course there were plenty of people in New York interested in the uprising, and Olive had made appointments, in advance, which filled the whole afternoon. Everybody wanted to meet them, and wanted everybody else to do so, and Verena saw they could easily have quite a vogue, if they only chose to stay and work that vein. Very likely, as Olive said, it wasn't their real life, and people didn't seem to have such a grip of the movement as they had in Boston; but there was something in the air that carried one along, and a sense of vastness and variety, of the infinite possibilities of a great city, which—Verena hardly knew whether she ought to confess it to herself—might in the end make up for the want of the Boston earnestness. Certainly, the people seemed very much alive, and there was no other place where so many cheering reports could flow in, owing to the number of electric feelers that stretched away everywhere. The principal centre appeared to be Mrs. Croucher's, on Fifty-sixth Street, where there was an informal gathering of sympathisers who didn't seem as if they could forgive her when they learned that she had been speaking the night before in a circle in which none of them were acquainted. Certainly, they were very different from the group she had addressed at Mrs. Burrage's, and Verena heaved a thin, private sigh, expressive of some helplessness, as she thought what a big, complicated world it was, and how it evidently contained a little of everything. There was a general demand that she should repeat her address in a more congenial atmosphere; to which she replied that Olive made her engagements for her, and that as the address had been intended just to lead people on, perhaps she

would think Mrs. Croucher's friends had reached a higher point. She was as cautious as this because she saw that Olive was now just straining to get out of the city; she didn't want to say anything that would tie them. When she felt her trembling that way before luncheon it made her quite sick to realise how much her friend was wrapped up in her—how terribly she would suffer from the least deviation. After they had started for their round of engagements the very first thing Verena spoke of in the carriage (Olive had taken one, in her liberal way, for the whole time) was the fact that her correspondence with Mr. Ransom, as her friend had called it, had consisted on his part of only one letter. It was a very short one, too; it had come to her a little more than a month before. Olive knew she got letters from gentlemen; she didn't see why she should attach such importance to this one. Miss Chancellor was leaning back in the carriage, very still, very grave, with her head against the cushioned surface, only turning her eyes towards the girl.

"You attach importance yourself; otherwise you would have told me."

"I knew you wouldn't like it—because you don't like *him*."

"I don't think of him," said Olive; "he's nothing to me." Then she added, suddenly, "Have you noticed that I am afraid to face what I don't like?"

Verena could not say that she had, and yet it was not just on Olive's part to speak as if she were an easy person to tell such a thing to: the way she lay there, white and weak, like a wounded creature, sufficiently proved the contrary. "You have such a fearful power of suffering," she replied in a moment.

To this at first Miss Chancellor made no rejoinder; but after a little she said, in the same attitude, "Yes, *you* could make me."

Verena took her hand and held it awhile. "I never will, till I have been through everything myself."

"*You* were not made to suffer—you were made to enjoy," Olive said, in very much the same tone in which she had told her that what was the matter with her was that she didn't dislike men as a class —a tone which implied that the contrary would have been much more natural and perhaps rather higher. Perhaps it would; but Verena was unable to rebut the charge; she felt this, as she looked out of the window of the carriage at the bright, amusing city, where the elements seemed so numerous, the animation so immense, the shops so brilliant, the women so strikingly dressed, and knew that these things quickened her curiosity, all her pulses.

"Well, I suppose I mustn't presume on it," she remarked, glancing back at Olive with her natural sweetness, her uncontradicting grace.

That young lady lifted her hand to her lips—held it there a moment; the movement seemed to say, "When you are so divinely docile, how can I help the dread of losing you?" This idea, however, was unspoken, and Olive Chancellor's uttered words, as the carriage rolled on, were different.

"Verena, I don't understand why he wrote to you."

"He wrote to me because he likes me. Perhaps you'll say you don't understand why he likes me," the girl continued, laughing. "He liked me the first time he saw me."

"Oh, that time!" Olive murmured.

"And still more the second."

"Did he tell you that in his letter?" Miss Chancellor inquired.

"Yes, my dear, he told me that. Only he expressed it more gracefully." Verena was very happy

to say that; a written phrase of Basil Ransom's sufficiently justified her.

"It was my intuition—it was my foreboding!" Olive exclaimed, closing her eyes.

"I thought you said you didn't dislike him."

"It isn't dislike—it's simple dread. Is that all there is between you?"

"Why, Olive Chancellor, what do you think?" Verena asked, feeling now distinctly like a coward. Five minutes afterwards she said to Olive that if it would give her pleasure they would leave New York on the morrow, without taking a fourth day; and as soon as she had done so she felt better, especially when she saw how gratefully Olive looked at her for the concession, how eagerly she rose to the offer in saying, "Well, if you *do* feel that it isn't our own life—our very own!" It was with these words, and others besides, and with an unusually weak, indefinite kiss, as if she wished to protest that, after all, a single day didn't matter, and yet accepted the sacrifice and was a little ashamed of it—it was in this manner that the agreement as to an immediate retreat was sealed. Verena could not shut her eyes to the fact that for a month she had been less frank, and if she wished to do penance this abbreviation of their pleasure in New York, even if it made her almost completely miss Basil Ransom, was easier than to tell Olive just now that the letter was *not* all, that there had been a long visit, a talk, and a walk besides, which she had been covering up for ever so many weeks. And of what consequence, anyway, was the missing? Was it such a pleasure to converse with a gentleman who only wanted to let you know—and why he should want it so much Verena couldn't guess—that he thought you quite preposterous? Olive took her from place to place, and she ended by forgetting everything but the

present hour, and the bigness and variety of New York, and the entertainment of rolling about in a carriage with silk cushions, and meeting new faces, new expressions of curiosity and sympathy, assurances that one was watched and followed. Mingled with this was a bright consciousness, sufficient for the moment, that one was moreover to dine at Delmonico's and go to the German opera. There was enough of the epicurean in Verena's composition to make it easy for her in certain conditions to live only for the hour.

XXXI

When she returned with her companion to the establishment in Tenth Street she saw two notes lying on the table in the hall; one of which she perceived to be addressed to Miss Chancellor, the other to herself. The hand was different, but she recognised both. Olive was behind her on the steps, talking to the coachman about sending another carriage for them in half an hour (they had left themselves but just time to dress); so that she simply possessed herself of her own note and ascended to her room. As she did so she felt that all the while she had known it would be there, and was conscious of a kind of treachery, an unfriendly wilfulness, in not being more prepared for it. If she could roll about New York the whole afternoon and forget that there might be difficulties ahead, that didn't alter the fact that there *were* difficulties, and that they might even become considerable—might not be settled by her simply going back to Boston. Half an hour later, as she drove up the Fifth Avenue with Olive (there seemed to be so much crowded into that one day), smoothing her light gloves, wishing her fan were a little nicer, and proving by the answering, familiar brightness with which she looked out on the lamp-lighted streets that, whatever theory might be entertained as to the genesis of her talent and her personal nature, the blood of the lecture-going, night-walking

Tarrants did distinctly flow in her veins ; as the pair proceeded, I say, to the celebrated restaurant, at the door of which Mr. Burrage had promised to be in vigilant expectancy of their carriage, Verena found a sufficiently gay and natural tone of voice for remarking to her friend that Mr. Ransom had called upon her while they were out, and had left a note in which there were many compliments for Miss Chancellor.

" That's wholly your own affair, my dear," Olive replied, with a melancholy sigh, gazing down the vista of Fourteenth Street (which they happened just then to be traversing, with much agitation), toward the queer barrier of the elevated railway.

It was nothing new to Verena that if the great striving of Olive's life was for justice she yet sometimes failed to arrive at it in particular cases ; and she reflected that it was rather late for her to say, like that, that Basil Ransom's letters were only his correspondent's business. Had not his kinswoman quite made the subject her own during their drive that afternoon ? Verena determined now that her companion should hear all there was to be heard about the letter ; asking herself whether, if she told her at present more than she cared to know, it wouldn't make up for her hitherto having told her less. " He brought it with him, written, in case I should be out. He wants to see me to-morrow—he says he has ever so much to say to me. He proposes an hour—says he hopes it won't be inconvenient for me to see him about eleven in the morning ; thinks I may have no other engagement so early as that. Of course our return to Boston settles it," Verena added, with serenity.

Miss Chancellor said nothing for a moment ; then she replied, " Yes, unless you invite him to come on with you in the train."

"Why, Olive, how bitter you are!" Verena exclaimed, in genuine surprise.

Olive could not justify her bitterness by saying that her companion had spoken as if she were disappointed, because Verena had not. So she simply remarked, "I don't see what he can have to say to you—that would be worth your hearing."

"Well, of course, it's the other side. He has got it on the brain!" said Verena, with a laugh which seemed to relegate the whole matter to the category of the unimportant.

"If we should stay, would you see him—at eleven o'clock?" Olive inquired.

"Why do you ask that—when I have given it up?"

"Do you consider it such a tremendous sacrifice?"

"No," said Verena good-naturedly; "but I confess I am curious."

"Curious—how do you mean?"

"Well, to hear the other side."

"Oh heaven!" Olive Chancellor murmured, turning her face upon her.

"You must remember I have never heard it." And Verena smiled into her friend's wan gaze.

"Do you want to hear all the infamy that is in the world?"

"No, it isn't that; but the more he should talk the better chance he would give me. I guess I can meet him."

"Life is too short. Leave him as he is."

"Well," Verena went on, "there are many I haven't cared to move at all, whom I might have been more interested in than in him. But to make him give in just at two or three points—that I should like better than anything I have done."

"You have no business to enter upon a contest that isn't equal; and it wouldn't be, with Mr. Ransom."

"The inequality would be that I have right on my side."

"What is that—for a man? For what was their brutality given them, but to make that up?"

"I don't think he's brutal; I should like to see," said Verena gaily.

Olive's eyes lingered a little on her own; then they turned away, vaguely, blindly, out of the carriage-window, and Verena made the reflexion that she looked strangely little like a person who was going to dine at Delmonico's. How terribly she worried about everything, and how tragical was her nature; how anxious, suspicious, exposed to subtle influences! In their long intimacy Verena had come to revere most of her friend's peculiarities; they were a proof of her depth and devotion, and were so bound up with what was noble in her that she was rarely provoked to criticise them separately. But at present, suddenly, Olive's earnestness began to appear as inharmonious with the scheme of the universe as if it had been a broken saw; and she was positively glad she had not told her about Basil Ransom's appearance in Monadnoc Place. If she worried so about what she knew, how much would she not have worried about the rest! Verena had by this time made up her mind that her acquaintance with Mr. Ransom was the most episodical, most superficial, most unimportant of all possible relations.

Olive Chancellor watched Henry Burrage very closely that evening; she had a special reason for doing so, and her entertainment, during the successive hours, was derived much less from the delicate little feast over which this insinuating proselyte presided, in the brilliant public room of the establishment, where French waiters flitted about on deep carpets and parties at neighbouring tables excited curiosity and conjecture, or even from the magnificent music

of *Lohengrin*, than from a secret process of comparison and verification, which shall presently be explained to the reader. As some discredit has possibly been thrown upon her impartiality it is a pleasure to be able to say that on her return from the opera she took a step dictated by an earnest consideration of justice—of the promptness with which Verena had told her of the note left by Basil Ransom in the afternoon. She drew Verena into her room with her. The girl, on the way back to Tenth Street, had spoken only of Wagner's music, of the singers, the orchestra, the immensity of the house, her tremendous pleasure. Olive could see how fond she might become of New York, where that kind of pleasure was so much more in the air.

"Well, Mr. Burrage was certainly very kind to us—no one could have been more thoughtful," Olive said; and she coloured a little at the look with which Verena greeted this tribute of appreciation from Miss Chancellor to a single gentleman.

"I am so glad you were struck with that, because I do think we have been a little rough to him." Verena's *we* was angelic. "He was particularly attentive to you, my dear; he has got over me. He looked at you so sweetly. Dearest Olive, if you marry him——!" And Miss Tarrant, who was in high spirits, embraced her companion, to check her own silliness.

"He wants you to stay there, all the same. They haven't given *that* up," Olive remarked, turning to a drawer, out of which she took a letter.

"Did he tell you that, pray? He said nothing more about it to me."

"When we came in this afternoon I found this note from Mrs. Burrage. You had better read it." And she presented the document, open, to Verena.

The purpose of it was to say that Mrs. Burrage

could really not reconcile herself to the loss of Verena's visit, on which both she and her son had counted so much. She was sure they would be able to make it as interesting to Miss Tarrant as it would be to themselves. She, Mrs. Burrage, moreover, felt as if she hadn't heard half she wanted about Miss Tarrant's views, and there were so many more who were present at the address, who had come to her that afternoon (losing not a minute, as Miss Chancellor could see) to ask how in the world they too could learn more —how they could get at the fair speaker and question her about certain details. She hoped so much, therefore, that even if the young ladies should be unable to alter their decision about the visit they might at least see their way to staying over long enough to allow her to arrange an informal meeting for some of these poor thirsty souls. Might she not at least talk over the question with Miss Chancellor ? She gave her notice that she would attack her on the subject of the visit too. Might she not see her on the morrow, and might she ask of her the very great favour that the interview should be at Mrs. Burrage's own house ? She had something very particular to say to her, as regards which perfect privacy was a great consideration, and Miss Chancellor would doubtless recognise that this would be best secured under Mrs. Burrage's roof. She would therefore send her carriage for Miss Chancellor at any hour that would be convenient to the latter. She really thought much good might come from their having a satisfactory talk.

Verena read this epistle with much deliberation ; it seemed to her mysterious, and confirmed the idea she had received the night before—the idea that she had not got quite a correct impression of this clever, worldly, curious woman on the occasion of her visit to Cambridge, when they met her at her son's rooms.

As she gave the letter back to Olive she said, "That's why he didn't seem to believe we are really leaving to-morrow. He knows she had written that, and he thinks it will keep us."

"Well, if I were to say it may—should you think me too miserably changeful?"

Verena stared, with all her candour, and it was so very queer that Olive should now wish to linger that the sense of it, for the moment, almost covered the sense of its being pleasant. But that came out after an instant, and she said, with great honesty, "You needn't drag me away for consistency's sake. It would be absurd for me to pretend that I don't like being here."

"I think perhaps I ought to see her." Olive was very thoughtful.

"How lovely it must be to have a secret with Mrs. Burrage!" Verena exclaimed.

"It won't be a secret from you."

"Dearest, you needn't tell me unless you want," Verena went on, thinking of her own unimparted knowledge.

"I thought it was our plan to divide everything. It was certainly mine."

"Ah, don't talk about plans!" Verena exclaimed, rather ruefully. "You see, if we *are* going to stay to-morrow, how foolish it was to have any. There is more in her letter than is expressed," she added, as Olive appeared to be studying in her face the reasons for and against making this concession to Mrs. Burrage, and that was rather embarrassing.

"I thought it over all the evening—so that if now you will consent we will stay."

"Darling—what a spirit you have got! All through all those dear little dishes—all through *Lohengrin*! As I haven't thought it over at all, you must settle it. You know I am not difficult."

"And would you go and stay with Mrs. Burrage, after all, if she should say anything to me that seems to make it desirable?"

Verena broke into a laugh. "You know it's not our real life!"

Olive said nothing for a moment; then she replied: "Don't think *I* can forget that. If I suggest a deviation, it's only because it sometimes seems to me that perhaps, after all, almost anything is better than the form reality *may* take with us." This was slightly obscure, as well as very melancholy, and Verena was relieved when her companion remarked, in a moment, "You must think me strangely inconsequent"; for this gave her a chance to reply, soothingly:

"Why, you don't suppose I expect you to keep always screwed up! I will stay a week with Mrs. Burrage, or a fortnight, or a month, or anything you like," she pursued; "anything it may seem to you best to tell her after you have seen her."

"Do you leave it all to me? You don't give me much help," Olive said.

"Help to what?"

"Help to help *you*."

"I don't want any help; I am quite strong enough!" Verena cried gaily. The next moment she inquired, in an appeal half comical, half touching, "My dear colleague, why do you make me say such conceited things?"

"And if you do stay—just even to-morrow—shall you be—very much of the time—with Mr. Ransom?"

As Verena for the moment appeared ironically-minded, she might have found a fresh subject for hilarity in the tremulous, tentative tone in which Olive made this inquiry. But it had not that effect; it produced the first manifestation of impatience—the first, literally, and the first note of reproach—

that had occurred in the course of their remarkable intimacy. The colour rose to Verena's cheek, and her eye for an instant looked moist.

"I don't know what you always think, Olive, nor why you don't seem able to trust me. You didn't, from the first, with gentlemen. Perhaps you were right then—I don't say; but surely it is very different now. I don't think I ought to be suspected so much. Why have you a manner as if I had to be watched, as if I wanted to run away with every man that speaks to me? I should think I had proved how little I care. I thought you had discovered by this time that I am serious; that I have dedicated my life; that there is something unspeakably dear to me. But you begin again, every time—you don't do me justice. I must take everything that comes. I mustn't be afraid. I thought we had agreed that we were to do our work in the midst of the world, facing everything, keeping straight on, always taking hold. And now that it all opens out so magnificently, and victory is really sitting on our banners, it is strange of you to doubt of me, to suppose I am not more wedded to all our old dreams than ever. I told you the first time I saw you that I could renounce, and knowing better to-day, perhaps, what that means, I am ready to say it again. That I can, that I will! Why, Olive Chancellor," Verena cried, panting, a moment, with her eloquence, and with the rush of a culminating idea, "haven't you discovered by this time that I *have* renounced?"

The habit of public speaking, the training, the practice, in which she had been immersed, enabled Verena to unroll a coil of propositions dedicated even to a private interest with the most touching, most cumulative effect. Olive was completely aware of this, and she stilled herself, while the girl uttered one soft, pleading sentence after another, into the

same rapt attention she was in the habit of sending up from the benches of an auditorium. She looked at Verena fixedly, felt that she was stirred to her depths, that she was exquisitely passionate and sincere, that she was a quivering, spotless, consecrated maiden, that she really had renounced, that they were both safe, and that her own injustice and indelicacy had been great. She came to her slowly, took her in her arms and held her long—giving her a silent kiss. From which Verena knew that she believed her.

XXXII

THE hour that Olive proposed to Mrs. Burrage, in a note sent early the next morning, for the interview to which she consented to lend herself, was the stroke of noon; this period of the day being chosen in consequence of a prevision of many subsequent calls upon her time. She remarked in her note that she did not wish any carriage to be sent for her, and she surged and swayed up the Fifth Avenue on one of the convulsive, clattering omnibuses which circulate in that thoroughfare. One of her reasons for mentioning twelve o'clock had been that she knew Basil Ransom was to call at Tenth Street at eleven, and (as she supposed he didn't intend to stay all day) this would give her time to see him come and go. It had been tacitly agreed between them, the night before, that Verena was quite firm enough in her faith to submit to his visit, and that such a course would be much more dignified than dodging it. This understanding passed from one to the other during that dumb embrace which I have described as taking place before they separated for the night. Shortly before noon, Olive, passing out of the house, looked into the big, sunny double parlour, where, in the morning, with all the husbands absent for the day and all the wives and spinsters launched upon the town, a young man desiring to hold a debate with a young lady might enjoy every advantage in the way

of a clear field. Basil Ransom was still there; he and Verena, with the place to themselves, were standing in the recess of a window, their backs presented to the door. If he had got up, perhaps he was going, and Olive, softly closing the door again, waited a little in the hall, ready to pass into the back part of the house if she should hear him coming out. No sound, however, reached her ear; apparently he did mean to stay all day, and she should find him there on her return. She left the house, knowing they were looking at her from the window as she descended the steps, but feeling she could not bear to see Basil Ransom's face. As she walked, averting her own, towards the Fifth Avenue, on the sunny side, she was barely conscious of the loveliness of the day, the perfect weather, all suffused and tinted with spring, which sometimes descends upon New York when the winds of March have been stilled; she was given up only to the remembrance of that moment when she herself had stood at a window (the second time he came to see her in Boston), and watched Basil Ransom pass out with Adeline—with Adeline who had seemed capable then of getting such a hold on him but had proved as ineffectual in this respect as she was in every other. She recalled the vision she had allowed to dance before her as she saw the pair cross the street together, laughing and talking, and how it seemed to interpose itself against the fears which already then — so strangely — haunted her. Now that she saw it so fruitless—and that Verena, moreover, had turned out really so great—she was rather ashamed of it; she felt associated, however remotely, in the reasons which had made Mrs. Luna tell her so many fibs the day before, and there could be nothing elevating in that. As for the other reasons why her fidgety sister had failed and Mr. Ransom had held his own

course, naturally Miss Chancellor didn't like to think of them.

If she had wondered what Mrs. Burrage wished so particularly to talk about, she waited some time for the clearing-up of the mystery. During this interval she sat in a remarkably pretty boudoir, where there were flowers and faiences and little French pictures, and watched her hostess revolve round the subject in circles the vagueness of which she tried to dissimulate. Olive believed she was a person who never could enjoy asking a favour, especially of a votary of the new ideas; and that was evidently what was coming. She had asked one already, but that had been handsomely paid for; the note from Mrs. Burrage which Verena found awaiting her in Tenth Street, on her arrival, contained the largest cheque this young woman had ever received for an address. The request that hung fire had reference to Verena too, of course; and Olive needed no prompting to feel that her friend's being a young person who took money could not make Mrs. Burrage's present effort more agreeable. To this taking of money (for when it came to Verena it was as if it came to her as well) she herself was now completely inured; money was a tremendous force, and when one wanted to assault the wrong with every engine one was happy not to lack the sinews of war. She liked her hostess better this morning than she had liked her before; she had more than ever the air of taking all sorts of sentiments and views for granted between them; which could only be flattering to Olive so long as it was really Mrs. Burrage who made each advance, while her visitor sat watchful and motionless. She had a light, clever, familiar way of traversing an immense distance with a very few words, as when she remarked, "Well, then, it is

settled that she will come, and will stay till she is tired."

Nothing of the kind had been settled, but Olive helped Mrs. Burrage (this time) more than she knew by saying, "Why do you want her to visit you, Mrs. Burrage? why do you want her socially? Are you not aware that your son, a year ago, desired to marry her?"

"My dear Miss Chancellor, that is just what I wish to talk to you about. I am aware of everything; I don't believe you ever met any one who is aware of more things than I." And Olive had to believe this, as Mrs. Burrage held up, smiling, her intelligent, proud, good-natured, successful head. "I knew a year ago that my son was in love with your friend, I know that he has been so ever since, and that in consequence he would like to marry her to-day. I daresay you don't like the idea of her marrying at all; it would break up a friendship which is so full of interest" (Olive wondered for a moment whether she had been going to say "so full of profit") "for you. This is why I hesitated; but since you are willing to talk about it, that is just what I want."

"I don't see what good it will do," Olive said.

"How can we tell till we try? I never give a thing up till I have turned it over in every sense."

It was Mrs. Burrage, however, who did most of the talking; Olive only inserted from time to time an inquiry, a protest, a correction, an ejaculation tinged with irony. None of these things checked or diverted her hostess; Olive saw more and more that she wished to please her, to win her over, to smooth matters down, to place them in a new and original light. She was very clever and (little by little Olive said to herself) absolutely unscrupulous, but she didn't think she was clever enough for what she had undertaken. This was neither more nor less,

in the first place, than to persuade Miss Chancellor that she and her son were consumed with sympathy for the movement to which Miss Chancellor had dedicated her life. But how could Olive believe that, when she saw the type to which Mrs. Burrage belonged —a type into which nature herself had inserted a face turned in the very opposite way from all earnest and improving things? People like Mrs. Burrage lived and fattened on abuses, prejudices, privileges, on the petrified, cruel fashions of the past. It must be added, however, that if her hostess was a humbug, Olive had never met one who provoked her less; she was such a brilliant, genial, artistic one, with such a recklessness of perfidy, such a willingness to bribe you if she couldn't deceive you. She seemed to be offering Olive all the kingdoms of the earth if she would only exert herself to bring about a state of feeling on Verena Tarrant's part which would lead the girl to accept Henry Burrage.

"We know it's you—the whole business; that you can do what you please. You could decide it to-morrow with a word."

She had hesitated at first, and spoken of her hesitation, and it might have appeared that she would need all her courage to say to Olive, that way, face to face, that Verena was in such subjection to her. But she didn't look afraid; she only looked as if it were an infinite pity Miss Chancellor couldn't understand what immense advantages and rewards there would be for her in striking an alliance with the house of Burrage. Olive was so impressed with this, so occupied, even, in wondering what these mystic benefits might be, and whether after all there might not be a protection in them (from something worse), a fund of some sort that she and Verena might convert to a large use, setting aside the mother and son when once they had got what they had to

give—she was so arrested with the vague daze of this vision, the sense of Mrs. Burrage's full hands, her eagerness, her thinking it worth while to flatter and conciliate, whatever her pretexts and pretensions might be, that she was almost insensible, for the time, to the strangeness of such a woman's coming round to a positive desire for a connexion with the Tarrants. Mrs. Burrage had indeed explained this partly by saying that her son's condition was wearing her out, and that she would enter into anything that would make him happier, make him better. She was fonder of him than of the whole world beside, and it was an anguish to her to see him yearning for Miss Tarrant only to lose her. She made that charge about Olive's power in the matter in such a way that it seemed at the same time a tribute to her force of character.

"I don't know on what terms you suppose me to be with my friend," Olive returned, with considerable majesty. "She will do exactly as she likes, in such a case as the one you allude to. She is absolutely free; you speak as if I were her keeper!"

Then Mrs. Burrage explained that of course she didn't mean that Miss Chancellor exercised a conscious tyranny; but only that Verena had a boundless admiration for her, saw through her eyes, took the impress of all her opinions, preferences. She was sure that if Olive would only take a favourable view of her son Miss Tarrant would instantly throw herself into it. "It's very true that you may ask me," added Mrs. Burrage, smiling, "how you can take a favourable view of a young man who wants to marry the very person in the world you want most to keep unmarried!"

This description of Verena was of course perfectly correct; but it was not agreeable to Olive to have the fact in question so clearly perceived, even by a

person who expressed it with an air intimating that there was nothing in the world *she* couldn't understand.

"Did your son know that you were going to speak to me about this?" Olive asked, rather coldly, waiving the question of her influence on Verena and the state in which she wished her to remain.

"Oh yes, poor dear boy; we had a long talk yesterday, and I told him I would do what I could for him. Do you remember the little visit I paid to Cambridge last spring, when I saw you at his rooms? Then it was I began to perceive how the wind was setting; but yesterday we had a real *éclaircissement.* I didn't like it at all, at first; I don't mind telling you that, now—now that I am really enthusiastic about it. When a girl is as charming, as original, as Miss Tarrant, it doesn't in the least matter who she is; she makes herself the standard by which you measure her; she makes her own position. And then Miss Tarrant has such a future!" Mrs. Burrage added, quickly, as if that were the last thing to be overlooked. "The whole question has come up again—the feeling that Henry tried to think dead, or at least dying, has revived, through the—I hardly know what to call it, but I really may say the unexpectedly great effect of her appearance here. She was really wonderful on Wednesday evening; prejudice, conventionality, every presumption there might be against her, had to fall to the ground. I expected a success, but I didn't expect what you gave us," Mrs. Burrage went on, smiling, while Olive noted her "you." "In short, my poor boy flamed up again; and now I see that he will never again care for any girl as he cares for that one. My dear Miss Chancellor, *j'en ai pris mon parti,* and perhaps you know my way of doing that sort of thing. I am not at all good at resigning myself, but I am excellent

at taking up a craze. I haven't renounced, I have only changed sides. For or against, I must be a partisan. Don't you know that kind of nature? Henry has put the affair into my hands, and you see I put it into yours. Do help me; let us work together."

This was a long, explicit speech for Mrs. Burrage, who dealt, usually, in the cursory and allusive; and she may very well have expected that Miss Chancellor would recognise its importance. What Olive did, in fact, was simply to inquire, by way of rejoinder: "Why did you ask us to come on?"

If Mrs. Burrage hesitated now, it was only for twenty seconds. "Simply because we are so interested in your work."

"That surprises me," said Olive thoughtfully.

"I daresay you don't believe it; but such a judgement is superficial. I am sure we give proof in the offer we make," Mrs. Burrage remarked, with a good deal of point. "There are plenty of girls—without any views at all—who would be delighted to marry my son. He is very clever, and he has a large fortune. Add to that that he's an angel!"

That was very true, and Olive felt all the more that the attitude of these fortunate people, for whom the world was so well arranged just as it was, was very curious. But as she sat there it came over her that the human spirit has many variations, that the influence of the truth is great, and that there are such things in life as happy surprises, quite as well as disagreeable ones. Nothing, certainly, forced such people to fix their affections on the daughter of a "healer"; it would be very clumsy to pick her out of her generation only for the purpose of frustrating her. Moreover, her observation of their young host at Delmonico's and in the spacious box at the Academy of Music, where they had privacy and ease, and

murmured words could pass without making neighbours more given up to the stage turn their heads—her consideration of Henry Burrage's manner, suggested to her that she had measured him rather scantily the year before, that he was as much in love as the feebler passions of the age permitted (for though Miss Chancellor believed in the amelioration of humanity, she thought there was too much water in the blood of all of us), that he prized Verena for her rarity, which was her genius, her gift, and would therefore have an interest in promoting it, and that he was of so soft and fine a paste that his wife might do what she liked with him. Of course there would be the mother-in-law to count with; but unless she was perjuring herself shamelessly Mrs. Burrage really had the wish to project herself into the new atmosphere, or at least to be generous personally; so that, oddly enough, the fear that most glanced before Olive was not that this high, free matron, slightly irritable with cleverness and at the same time good-natured with prosperity, would bully her son's bride, but rather that she might take too fond a possession of her. It was a fear which may be described as a presentiment of jealousy. It occurred, accordingly, to Miss Chancellor's quick conscience that, possibly, the proposal which presented itself in circumstances so complicated and anomalous was simply a magnificent chance, an improvement on the very best, even, that she had dreamed of for Verena. It meant a large command of money—much larger than her own; the association of a couple of clever people who simulated conviction very well, whether they felt it or not, and who had a hundred useful worldly ramifications, and a kind of social pedestal from which she might really shine afar. The conscience I have spoken of grew positively sick as it thought of having such a problem as that to consider, such an ordeal to

traverse. In the presence of such a contingency the poor girl felt grim and helpless; she could only vaguely wonder whether she were called upon in the name of duty to lend a hand to the torture of her own spirit.

"And if she should marry him, how could I be sure that—afterwards—you would care so much about the question which has all our thoughts, hers and mine?" This inquiry evolved itself from Olive's rapid meditation; but even to herself it seemed a little rough.

Mrs. Burrage took it admirably. "You think we are feigning an interest, only to get hold of her? That's not very nice of you, Miss Chancellor; but of course you have to be tremendously careful. I assure you my son tells me he firmly believes your movement is the great question of the immediate future, that it has entered into a new phase; into what does he call it? the domain of practical politics. As for me, you don't suppose I don't want everything we poor women can get, or that I would refuse any privilege or advantage that's offered me? I don't rant or rave about anything, but I have—as I told you just now—my own quiet way of being zealous. If you had no worse partisan than I, you would do very well. My son has talked to me immensely about your ideas; and even if I should enter into them only because he does, I should do so quite enough. You may say you don't see Henry dangling about after a wife who gives public addresses; but I am convinced that a great many things are coming to pass—very soon, too—that we don't see in advance. Henry is a gentleman to his finger-tips, and there is not a situation in which he will not conduct himself with tact."

Olive could see that they really wanted Verena immensely, and it was impossible for her to believe

that if they were to get her they would not treat her well. It came to her that they would even over-indulge her, flatter her, spoil her; she was perfectly capable, for the moment, of assuming that Verena was susceptible of deterioration and that her own treatment of her had been discriminatingly severe. She had a hundred protests, objections, replies; her only embarrassment could be as to which she should use first.

"I think you have never seen Doctor Tarrant and his wife," she remarked, with a calmness which she felt to be very pregnant.

"You mean they are absolutely fearful? My son has told me they are quite impossible, and I am quite prepared for that. Do you ask how we should get on with them? My dear young lady, we should get on as you do!"

If Olive had answers, so had Mrs. Burrage; she had still an answer when her visitor, taking up the supposition that it was in her power to dispose in any manner whatsoever of Verena, declared that she didn't know why Mrs. Burrage addressed herself to *her*, that Miss Tarrant was free as air, that her future was in her own hands, that such a matter as this was a kind of thing with which it could never occur to one to interfere. "Dear Miss Chancellor, we don't ask you to interfere. The only thing we ask of you is simply *not* to interfere."

"And have you sent for me only for that?"

"For that, and for what I hinted at in my note; that you would really exercise your influence with Miss Tarrant to induce her to come to us now for a week or two. That is really, after all, the main thing I ask. Lend her to us, here, for a little while, and we will take care of the rest. That sounds conceited—but she *would* have a good time."

"She doesn't live for that," said Olive.

"What I mean is that she should deliver an address every night!" Mrs. Burrage returned, smiling.

"I think you try to prove too much. You do believe—though you pretend you don't—that I control her actions, and as far as possible her desires, and that I am jealous of any other relations she may possibly form. I can imagine that we may perhaps have that air, though it only proves how little such an association as ours is understood, and how superficial is still"—Olive felt that her "still" was really historical—"the interpretation of many of the elements in the activity of women, how much the public conscience with regard to them needs to be educated. Your conviction with respect to my attitude being what I believe it to be," Miss Chancellor went on, "I am surprised at your not perceiving how little it is in my interest to deliver my—my victim up to you."

If we were at this moment to take, in a single glance, an inside view of Mrs. Burrage (a liberty we have not yet ventured on), I suspect we should find that she was considerably exasperated at her visitor's superior tone, at seeing herself regarded by this dry, shy, obstinate, provincial young woman as superficial. If she liked Verena very nearly as much as she tried to convince Miss Chancellor, she was conscious of disliking Miss Chancellor more than she should probably ever be able to reveal to Verena. It was doubtless partly her irritation that found a voice as she said, after a self-administered pinch of caution not to say too much, "Of course it would be absurd in us to assume that Miss Tarrant would find my son irresistible, especially as she has already refused him. But even if she should remain obdurate, should you consider yourself quite safe as regards others?"

The manner in which Miss Chancellor rose from

her chair on hearing these words showed her hostess that if she had wished to take a little revenge by frightening her, the experiment was successful. "What others do you mean?" Olive asked, standing very straight, and turning down her eyes as from a great height.

Mrs. Burrage—since we have begun to look into her mind we may continue the process—had not meant any one in particular; but a train of association was suddenly kindled in her thought by the flash of the girl's resentment. She remembered the gentleman who had come up to her in the music-room, after Miss Tarrant's address, while she was talking with Olive, and to whom that young lady had given so cold a welcome. "I don't mean any one in particular; but, for instance, there is the young man to whom she asked me to send an invitation to my party, and who looked to me like a possible admirer." Mrs. Burrage also got up; then she stood a moment, closer to her visitor. "Don't you think it's a good deal to expect that, young, pretty, attractive, clever, charming as she is, you should be able to keep her always, to exclude other affections, to cut off a whole side of life, to defend her against dangers—if you call them dangers—to which every young woman who is not positively repulsive is exposed? My dear young lady, I wonder if I might give you three words of advice?" Mrs. Burrage did not wait till Olive had answered this inquiry; she went on quickly, with her air of knowing exactly what she wanted to say and feeling at the same time that, good as it might be, the manner of saying it, like the manner of saying most other things, was not worth troubling much about. "Don't attempt the impossible. You have got hold of a good thing; don't spoil it by trying to stretch it too far. If you don't take the better, perhaps you will have to take

the worse; if it's safety you want I should think she was much safer with my son—for with us you know the worst—than as a possible prey to adventurers, to exploiters, or to people who, once they had got hold of her, would shut her up altogether."

Olive dropped her eyes; she couldn't endure Mrs. Burrage's horrible expression of being near the mark, her look of worldly cleverness, of a confidence born of much experience. She felt that nothing would be spared her, that she should have to go to the end, that this ordeal also must be faced, and that, in particular, there was a detestable wisdom in her hostess's advice. She was conscious, however, of no obligation to recognise it then and there; she wanted to get off, and even to carry Mrs. Burrage's sapient words along with her—to hurry to some place where she might be alone and think. "I don't know why you have thought it right to send for me only to say this. I take no interest whatever in your son—in his settling in life." And she gathered her mantle more closely about her, turning away.

"It is exceedingly kind of you to have come," said Mrs. Burrage imperturbably. "Think of what I have said; I am sure you won't feel that you have wasted your hour."

"I have a great many things to think of!" Olive exclaimed insincerely; for she knew that Mrs. Burrage's ideas would haunt her.

"And tell her that if she will make us the little visit, all New York shall sit at her feet!"

That was what Olive wanted, and yet it seemed a mockery to hear Mrs. Burrage say it. Miss Chancellor retreated, making no response even when her hostess declared again that she was under great obligations to her for coming. When she reached the street she found she was deeply agitated, but not with a sense of weakness; she hurried along, excited and dismayed,

feeling that her insufferable conscience was bristling like some irritated animal, that a magnificent offer had really been made to Verena, and that there was no way for her to persuade herself she might be silent about it. Of course, if Verena should be tempted by the idea of being made so much of by the Burrages, the danger of Basil Ransom getting any kind of hold on her would cease to be pressing. That was what was present to Olive as she walked along, and that was what made her nervous, conscious only of this problem that had suddenly turned the bright day to greyness, heedless of the sophisticated-looking people who passed her on the wide Fifth Avenue pavement. It had risen in her mind the day before, planted first by Mrs. Burrage's note; and then, as we know, she had vaguely entertained the conception, asking Verena whether she would make the visit if it were again to be pressed upon them. It had been pressed, certainly, and the terms of the problem were now so much sharper that they seemed cruel. What had been in her own mind was that if Verena should appear to lend herself to the Burrages Basil Ransom might be discouraged—might think that, shabby and poor, there was no chance for him as against people with every advantage of fortune and position. She didn't see him relax his purpose so easily; she knew she didn't believe he was of that pusillanimous fibre. Still, it was a chance, and any chance that might help her had been worth considering. At present she saw it was a question not of Verena's lending herself, but of a positive gift, or at least of a bargain in which the terms would be immensely liberal. It would be impossible to use the Burrages as a shelter on the assumption that they were not dangerous, for they became dangerous from the moment they set up as sympathisers, took the ground that what they offered the girl was simply a boundless opportunity. It

came back to Olive, again and again, that this was, and could only be, fantastic and false; but it was always possible that Verena might not think it so, might trust them all the way. When Miss Chancellor had a pair of alternatives to consider, a question of duty to study, she put a kind of passion into it—felt, above all, that the matter must be settled that very hour, before anything in life could go on. It seemed to her at present that she couldn't re-enter the house in Tenth Street without having decided first whether she might trust the Burrages or not. By "trust" them, she meant trust them to fail in winning Verena over, while at the same time they put Basil Ransom on a false scent. Olive was able to say to herself that he probably wouldn't have the hardihood to push after her into those gilded saloons, which, in any event, would be closed to him as soon as the mother and son should discover what he wanted. She even asked herself whether Verena would not be still better defended from the young Southerner in New York, amid complicated hospitalities, than in Boston with a cousin of the enemy. She continued to walk down the Fifth Avenue, without noticing the cross-streets, and after a while became conscious that she was approaching Washington Square. By this time she had also definitely reasoned it out that Basil Ransom and Henry Burrage could not both capture Miss Tarrant, that therefore there could not be two dangers, but only one; that this was a good deal gained, and that it behoved her to determine which peril had most reality, in order that she might deal with that one only. She held her way to the Square, which, as all the world knows, is of great extent and open to the encircling street. The trees and grass-plats had begun to bud and sprout, the fountains plashed in the sunshine, the children of the quarter, both the dingier types from the south side, who

played games that required much chalking of the paved walks, and much sprawling and crouching there, under the feet of passers, and the little curled and feathered people who drove their hoops under the eyes of French nursemaids—all the infant population filled the vernal air with small sounds which had a crude, tender quality, like the leaves and the thin herbage. Olive wandered through the place, and ended by sitting down on one of the continuous benches. It was a long time since she had done anything so vague, so wasteful. There were a dozen things which, as she was staying over in New York, she ought to do; but she forgot them, or, if she thought of them, felt that they were now of no moment. She remained in her place an hour, brooding, tremulous, turning over and over certain thoughts. It seemed to her that she was face to face with a crisis of her destiny, and that she must not shrink from seeing it exactly as it was. Before she rose to return to Tenth Street she had made up her mind that there was no menace so great as the menace of Basil Ransom; she had accepted in thought any arrangement which would deliver her from that. If the Burrages were to take Verena they would take her from Olive immeasurably less than he would do; it was from him, from him they would take her most. She walked back to her boarding-house, and the servant who admitted her said, in answer to her inquiry as to whether Verena were at home, that Miss Tarrant had gone out with the gentleman who called in the morning, and had not yet come in. Olive stood staring; the clock in the hall marked three.

XXXIII

"COME out with me, Miss Tarrant; come out with me. *Do* come out with me." That was what Basil Ransom had been saying to Verena when they stood where Olive perceived them, in the embrasure of the window. It had of course taken considerable talk to lead up to this; for the tone, even more than the words, indicated a large increase of intimacy. Verena was mindful of this when he spoke; and it frightened her a little, made her uneasy, which was one of the reasons why she got up from her chair and went to the window—an inconsequent movement, inasmuch as her wish was to impress upon him that it was impossible she should comply with his request. It would have served this end much better for her to sit, very firmly, in her place. He made her nervous and restless; she was beginning to perceive that he produced a peculiar effect upon her. Certainly, she had been out with him at home the very first time he called upon her; but it seemed to her to make an important difference that she herself should then have proposed the walk—simply because it was the easiest thing to do when a person came to see you in Monadnoc Place.

They had gone out that time because she wanted to, not because he did. And then it was one thing for her to stroll with him round Cambridge, where she knew every step and had the confidence and

freedom which came from being on her own ground, and the pretext, which was perfectly natural, of wanting to show him the colleges, and quite another thing to go wandering with him through the streets of this great strange city, which, attractive, delightful as it was, had not the suitableness even of being his home, not his real one. He wanted to show her something, he wanted to show her everything; but she was not sure now—after an hour's talk—that she particularly wanted to see anything more that he could show her. He had shown her a great deal while he sat there, especially what balderdash he thought it—the whole idea of women's being equal to men. He seemed to have come only for that, for he was all the while revolving round it; she couldn't speak of anything but what he brought it back to the question of some new truth like that. He didn't say so in so many words; on the contrary, he was tremendously insinuating and satirical, and pretended to think she had proved all and a great deal more than she wanted to prove; but his exaggeration, and the way he rung all the changes on two or three of the points she had made at Mrs. Burrage's, were just the sign that he was a scoffer of scoffers. He wouldn't do anything but laugh; he seemed to think that he might laugh at her all day without her taking offence. Well, he might if it amused him; but she didn't see why she should ramble round New York with him to give him his opportunity.

She had told him, and she had told Olive, that she was determined to produce some effect on him; but now, suddenly, she felt differently about that—she ceased to care whether she produced any effect or not. She didn't see why she should take him so seriously, when he wouldn't take her so; that is, wouldn't take her ideas. She had guessed before

that he didn't want to discuss them ; this had been in her mind when she said to him at Cambridge that his interest in her was personal, not controversial. Then she had simply meant that, as an inquiring young Southerner, he had wanted to see what a bright New England girl was like ; but since then it had become a little more clear to her—her short talk with Ransom at Mrs. Burrage's threw some light upon the question—what the personal interest of a young Southerner (however inquiring merely) might amount to. Did he too want to make love to her ? This idea made Verena rather impatient, weary in advance. The thing she desired least in the world was to be put into the wrong with Olive ; for she had certainly given her ground to believe (not only in their scene the night before, which was a simple repetition, but all along, from the very first) that she really had an interest which would transcend any attraction coming from such a source as that. If yesterday it seemed to her that she should like to struggle with Mr. Ransom, to refute and convince him, she had this morning gone into the parlour to receive him with the idea that, now they were alone together in a quiet, favourable place, he would perhaps take up the different points of her address one by one, as several gentlemen had done after hearing her on other occasions. There was nothing she liked so well as that, and Olive never had anything to say against it. But he hadn't taken up anything ; he had simply laughed and chaffed, and unrolled a string of queer fancies about the delightful way women would fix things when, as she said in her address, they should get out of their box. He kept talking about the box ; he seemed as if he wouldn't let go that simile. He said that he had come to look at her through the glass sides, and if he wasn't afraid of hurting her he would smash them in. He was determined to find

the key that would open it, if he had to look for it all over the world ; it was tantalising only to be able to talk to her through the keyhole. If he didn't want to take up the subject, he at least wanted to take *her* up—to keep his hand upon her as long as he could. Verena had had no such sensation since the first day she went in to see Olive Chancellor, when she felt herself plucked from the earth and borne aloft.

" It's the most lovely day, and I should like so much to show you New York, as you showed me your beautiful Harvard," Basil Ransom went on, pressing her to accede to his proposal. " You said that was the only thing you could do for me then, and so this is the only thing I can do for you here. It would be odious to see you go away, giving me nothing but this stiff little talk in a boarding-house parlour."

" Mercy, if you call this stiff ! " Verena exclaimed, laughing, while at that moment Olive passed out of the house and descended the steps before her eyes.

" My poor cousin's stiff ; she won't turn her head a hair's breadth to look at us," said the young man. Olive's figure, as she went by, was, for Verena, full of a queer, touching, tragic expression, saying ever so many things, both familiar and strange ; and Basil Ransom's companion privately remarked how little men knew about women, or indeed about what was really delicate, that he, without any cruel intention, should attach an idea of ridicule to such an incarnation of the pathetic, should speak rough, derisive words about it. Ransom, in truth, to-day, was not disposed to be very scrupulous, and he only wanted to get rid of Olive Chancellor, whose image, at last, decidedly bothered and bored him. He was glad to see her go out ; but that was not sufficient, she would come back quick enough ; the place itself contained

her, expressed her. For to-day he wanted to take possession of Verena, to carry her to a distance, to reproduce a little the happy conditions they had enjoyed the day of his visit to Cambridge. And the fact that in the nature of things it could only be for to-day made his desire more keen, more full of purpose. He had thought over the whole question in the last forty-eight hours, and it was his belief that he saw things in their absolute reality. He took a greater interest in her than he had taken in any one yet, but he proposed, after to-day, not to let that accident make any difference. This was precisely what gave its high value to the present limited occasion. He was too shamefully poor, too shabbily and meagrely equipped, to have the right to talk of marriage to a girl in Verena's very peculiar position. He understood now how good that position was, from a worldly point of view; her address at Mrs. Burrage's gave him something definite to go upon, showed him what she could do, that people would flock in thousands to an exhibition so charming (and small blame to them); that she might easily have a big career, like that of a distinguished actress or singer, and that she would make money in quantities only slightly smaller than performers of that kind. Who wouldn't pay half a dollar for such an hour as he had passed at Mrs. Burrage's? The sort of thing she was able to do, to say, was an article for which there was more and more demand—fluent, pretty, third-rate palaver, conscious or unconscious perfected humbug; the stupid, gregarious, gullible public, the enlightened democracy of his native land, could swallow unlimited draughts of it. He was sure she could go, like that, for several years, with her portrait in the druggists' windows and her posters on the fences, and during that time would make a fortune sufficient to keep her in affluence for evermore. I

shall perhaps expose our young man to the contempt of superior minds if I say that all this seemed to him an insuperable impediment to his making up to Verena. His scruples were doubtless begotten of a false pride, a sentiment in which there was a thread of moral tinsel, as there was in the Southern idea of chivalry; but he felt ashamed of his own poverty, the positive flatness of his situation, when he thought of the gilded nimbus that surrounded the protégée of Mrs. Burrage. This shame was possible to him even while he was conscious of what a mean business it was to practise upon human imbecility, how much better it was even to be seedy and obscure, discouraged about one's self. He had been born to the prospect of a fortune, and in spite of the years of misery that followed the war had never rid himself of the belief that a gentleman who desired to unite himself to a charming girl couldn't yet ask her to come and live with him in sordid conditions. On the other hand it was no possible basis of matrimony that Verena should continue for his advantage the exercise of her remunerative profession; if he should become her husband he should know a way to strike her dumb. In the midst of this an irrepressible desire urged him on to taste, for once, deeply, all that he was condemned to lose, or at any rate forbidden to attempt to gain. To spend a day with her and not to see her again—that presented itself to him at once as the least and the most that was possible. He did not need even to remind himself that young Mr. Burrage was able to offer her everything *he* lacked, including the most amiable adhesion to her views.

"It will be charming in the Park to-day. Why not take a stroll with me there as I did with you in the little park at Harvard?" he asked, when Olive had disappeared.

"Oh, I have seen it, very well, in every corner.

A friend of mine kindly took me to drive there yesterday," Verena said.

"A friend?—do you mean Mr. Burrage?" And Ransom stood looking at her with his extraordinary eyes. "Of course, I haven't a vehicle to drive you in; but we can sit on a bench and talk." She didn't say it was Mr. Burrage, but she was unable to say it was not, and something in her face showed him that he had guessed. So he went on: "Is it only with him you can go out? Won't he like it, and may you only do what he likes? Mrs. Luna told me he wants to marry you, and I saw at his mother's how he stuck to you. If you are going to marry him, you can drive with him every day in the year, and that's just a reason for your giving me an hour or two now, before it becomes impossible." He didn't mind much what he said—it had been his plan not to mind much to-day—and so long as he made her do what he wanted he didn't care much how he did it. But he saw that his words brought the colour to her face; she stared, surprised at his freedom and familiarity. He went on, dropping the hardness, the irony of which he was conscious, out of his tone. "I know it's no business of mine whom you marry, or even whom you drive with, and I beg your pardon if I seem indiscreet and obtrusive; but I would give anything just to detach you a little from your ties, your belongings, and feel for an hour or two, as if—as if——" And he paused.

"As if what?" she asked, very seriously.

"As if there were no such person as Mr. Burrage—as Miss Chancellor—in the whole place." This had not been what he was going to say; he used different words.

"I don't know what you mean, why you speak of other persons. I can do as I like, perfectly. But I don't know why you should take so for granted

that *that* would be it!" Verena spoke these words not out of coquetry, or to make him beg her more for a favour, but because she was thinking, and she wanted to gain a moment. His allusion to Henry Burrage touched her, his belief that she had been in the Park under circumstances more agreeable than those he proposed. They were not; somehow, she wanted him to know that. To wander there with a companion, slowly stopping, lounging, looking at the animals as she had seen the people do the day before; to sit down in some out-of-the-way part where there were distant views, which she had noticed from her high perch beside Henry Burrage—she had to look down so, it made her feel unduly fine: that was much more to her taste, much more her idea of true enjoyment. It came over her that Mr. Ransom had given up his work to come to her at such an hour; people of his kind, in the morning, were always getting their living, and it was only for Mr. Burrage that it didn't matter, inasmuch as he had no profession. Mr. Ransom simply wanted to give up his whole day. That pressed upon her; she was, as the most good-natured girl in the world, too entirely tender not to feel any sacrifice that was made for her; she had always done everything that people asked. Then, if Olive should make that strange arrangement for her to go to Mrs. Burrage's he would take it as a proof that there was something serious between her and the gentleman of the house, in spite of anything she might say to the contrary; moreover, if she should go she wouldn't be able to receive Mr. Ransom there. Olive would trust her not to, and she must certainly, in future, not disappoint Olive nor keep anything back from her, whatever she might have done in the past. Besides, she didn't want to do that; she thought it much better not. It was this idea of the episode which was possibly in store for her in New York, and

from which her present companion would be so completely excluded, that worked upon her now with a rapid transition, urging her to grant him what he asked, so that in advance she should have made up for what she might not do for him later. But most of all she disliked his thinking she was engaged to some one. She didn't know, it is true, why she should mind it; and indeed, at this moment, our young lady's feelings were not in any way clear to her. She did not see what was the use of letting her acquaintance with Mr. Ransom become much closer (since his interest did really seem personal); and yet she presently asked him why he wanted her to go out with him, and whether there was anything particular he wanted to say to her (there was no one like Verena for making speeches apparently flirtatious, with the best faith and the most innocent intention in the world); as if that would not be precisely a reason to make it well she should get rid of him altogether.

"Of course I have something particular to say to you—I have a tremendous lot to say to you!" the young man exclaimed. "Far more than I can say in this stuck-up, confined room, which is public, too, so that any one may come in from one moment to another. Besides," he added sophistically, "it isn't proper for me to pay a visit of three hours."

Verena did not take up the sophistry, nor ask him whether it would be more proper for her to ramble about the city with him for an equal period; she only said, "Is it something that I shall care to hear, or that will do me any good?"

"Well, I hope it will do you good; but I don't suppose you will care much to hear it." Basil Ransom hesitated a moment, smiling at her; then he went on: "It's to tell you, once for all, how much I really do differ from you!" He said this at a venture, but it was a happy inspiration.

If it was only that, Verena thought she might go, for that was not personal. "Well, I'm glad you care so much," she answered musingly. But she had another scruple still, and she expressed it in saying that she should like Olive very much to find her when she came in.

"That's all very well," Ransom returned; "but does she think that she only has a right to go out? Does she expect you to keep the house because she's abroad? If she stays out long enough, she will find you when she comes in."

"Her going out that way—it proves that she trusts me," Verena said, with a candour which alarmed her as soon as she had spoken.

Her alarm was just, for Basil Ransom instantly caught up her words, with a great mocking amazement. "Trusts you? and why shouldn't she trust you? Are you a little girl of ten and she your governess? Haven't you any liberty at all, and is she always watching you and holding you to an account? Have you such vagabond instincts that you are only thought safe when you are between four walls?" Ransom was going on to speak, in the same tone, of her having felt it necessary to keep Olive in ignorance of his visit to Cambridge—a fact they had touched on, by implication, in their short talk at Mrs. Burrage's; but in a moment he saw that he had said enough. As for Verena, she had said more than she meant, and the simplest way to unsay it was to go and get her bonnet and jacket and let him take her where he liked. Five minutes later he was walking up and down the parlour, waiting while she prepared herself to go out.

They went up to the Central Park by the elevated railway, and Verena reflected, as they proceeded, that anyway Olive was probably disposing of her somehow at Mrs. Burrage's, and that therefore there

wasn't much harm in her just taking this little run on her own responsibility, especially as she should only be out an hour—which would be just the duration of Olive's absence. The beauty of the "elevated" was that it took you up to the Park and brought you back in a few minutes, and you had all the rest of the hour to walk about and see the place. It was so pleasant now that one was glad to see it twice over. The long, narrow enclosure, across which the houses in the streets that border it look at each other with their glittering windows, bristled with the raw delicacy of April, and, in spite of its rockwork grottoes and tunnels, its pavilions and statues, its too numerous paths and pavements, lakes too big for the landscape and bridges too big for the lakes, expressed all the fragrance and freshness of the most charming moment of the year. Once Verena was fairly launched the spirit of the day took possession of her; she was glad to have come, she forgot about Olive, enjoyed the sense of wandering in the great city with a remarkable young man who would take beautiful care of her, while no one else in the world knew where she was. It was very different from her drive yesterday with Mr. Burrage, but it was more free, more intense, more full of amusing incident and opportunity. She could stop and look at everything now, and indulge all her curiosities, even the most childish; she could feel as if she were out for the day, though she was not really—as she had not done since she was a little girl, when in the country, once or twice, when her father and mother had drifted into summer quarters, gone out of town like people of fashion, she had, with a chance companion, strayed far from home, spent hours in the woods and fields, looking for raspberries and playing she was a gipsy. Basil Ransom had begun with proposing, strenuously, that she should come somewhere and have luncheon; he had brought

her out half an hour before that meal was served in West Tenth Street, and he maintained that he owed her the compensation of seeing that she was properly fed; he knew a very quiet, luxurious French restaurant, near the top of the Fifth Avenue: he didn't tell her that he knew it through having once lunched there in company with Mrs. Luna. Verena for the present declined his hospitality—said she was going to be out so short a time that it wasn't worth the trouble; she should not be hungry, luncheon to her was nothing, she would eat when she went home. When he pressed her she said she would see later, perhaps, if she should find she wanted something. She would have liked immensely to go with him to an eating-house, and yet, with this, she was afraid, just as she was rather afraid, at bottom, and in the intervals of her quick pulsations of amusement, of the whole expedition, not knowing why she had come, though it made her happy, and reflecting that there was really nothing Mr. Ransom could have to say to her that would concern her closely enough. He knew what he intended about her sharing the noon-day repast with him somehow; it had been part of his plan that she should sit opposite him at a little table, taking her napkin out of its curious folds—sit there smiling back at him while he said to her certain things that hummed, like memories of tunes, in his fancy, and they waited till something extremely good, and a little vague, chosen out of a French *carte*, was brought them. That was not at all compatible with her going home at the end of half an hour, as she seemed to expect to. They visited the animals in the little zoological garden which forms one of the attractions of the Central Park; they observed the swans in the ornamental water, and they even considered the question of taking a boat for half an hour, Ransom saying that they needed this to make

their visit complete. · Verena replied that she didn't see why it should be complete, and after having threaded the devious ways of the Ramble, lost themselves in the Maze, and admired all the statues and busts of great men with which the grounds are decorated, they contented themselves with resting on a sequestered bench, where, however, there was a pretty glimpse of the distance and an occasional stroller creaked by on the asphalt walk.

They had had by this time a great deal of talk, none of which, nevertheless, had been serious to Verena's view. Mr. Ransom continued to joke about everything, including the emancipation of women; Verena, who had always lived with people who took the world very earnestly, had never encountered such a power of disparagement or heard so much sarcasm levelled at the institutions of her country and the tendencies of the age. At first she replied to him, contradicted, showed a high spirit of retort, turning his irreverence against himself; she was too quick and ingenious not to be able to think of something to oppose—talking in a fanciful strain—to almost everything he said. But little by little she grew weary and rather sad; brought up, as she had been, to admire new ideas, to criticise the social arrangements that one met almost everywhere, and to disapprove of a great many things, she had yet never dreamed of such a wholesale arraignment as Mr. Ransom's, so much bitterness as she saw lurking beneath his exaggerations, his misrepresentations. She knew he was an intense conservative, but she didn't know that being a conservative could make a person so aggressive and unmerciful. She thought conservatives were only smug and stubborn and self-complacent, satisfied with what actually existed; but Mr. Ransom didn't seem any more satisfied with what existed than with what she wanted to exist,

and he was ready to say worse things about some of those whom she would have supposed to be on his own side than she thought it right to say about almost any one. She ceased after a while to care to argue with him, and wondered what could have happened to him to make him so perverse. Probably something had gone wrong in his life—he had had some misfortune that coloured his whole view of the world. He was a cynic; she had often heard about that state of mind, though she had never encountered it, for all the people she had seen only cared, if possible, too much. Of Basil Ransom's personal history she knew only what Olive had told her, and that was but a general outline, which left plenty of room for private dramas, secret disappointments and sufferings. As she sat there beside him she thought of some of these things, asked herself whether they were what he was thinking of when he said, for instance, that he was sick of all the modern cant about freedom and had no sympathy with those who wanted an extension of it. What was needed for the good of the world was that people should make a better use of the liberty they possessed. Such declarations as this took Verena's breath away; she didn't suppose you could hear any one say such a thing as that in the nineteenth century, even the least advanced. It was of a piece with his denouncing the spread of education; he thought the spread of education a gigantic farce—people stuffing their heads with a lot of empty catchwords that prevented them from doing their work quietly and honestly. You had a right to an education only if you had an intelligence, and if you looked at the matter with any desire to see things as they are you soon perceived that an intelligence was a very rare luxury, the attribute of one person in a hundred. He seemed to take a pretty low view of humanity, anyway. Verena hoped

that something really bad had happened to him—not by way of gratifying any resentment he aroused in her nature, but to help herself to forgive him for so much contempt and brutality. She wanted to forgive him, for after they had sat on their bench half an hour and his jesting mood had abated a little, so that he talked with more consideration (as it seemed) and more sincerity, a strange feeling came over her, a perfect willingness not to keep insisting on her own side and a desire not to part from him with a mere accentuation of their differences. Strange I call the nature of her reflexions, for they softly battled with each other as she listened, in the warm, still air, touched with the far-away hum of the immense city, to his deep, sweet, distinct voice, expressing monstrous opinions with exotic cadences and mild, familiar laughs, which, as he leaned towards her, almost tickled her cheek and ear. It seemed to her strangely harsh, almost cruel, to have brought her out only to say to her things which, after all, free as she was to contradict them and tolerant as she always tried to be, could only give her pain; yet there was a spell upon her as she listened; it was in her nature to be easily submissive, to like being overborne. She could be silent when people insisted, and silent without acrimony. Her whole relation to Olive was a kind of tacit, tender assent to passionate insistence, and if this had ended by being easy and agreeable to her (and indeed had never been anything else), it may be supposed that the struggle of yielding to a will which she felt to be stronger even than Olive's was not of long duration. Ransom's will had the effect of making her linger even while she knew the afternoon was going on, that Olive would have come back and found her still absent, and would have been submerged again in the bitter waves of anxiety. She saw her, in fact, as she must

be at that moment, posted at the window of her room in Tenth Street, watching for some sign of her return, listening for her step on the staircase, her voice in the hall. Verena looked at this image as at a painted picture, perceived all it represented, every detail. If it didn't move her more, make her start to her feet, dart away from Basil Ransom and hurry back to her friend, this was because the very torment to which she was conscious of subjecting that friend made her say to herself that it must be the very last. This was the last time she could ever sit by Mr. Ransom and hear him express himself in a manner that interfered so with her life ; the ordeal had been so personal and so complete that she forgot, for the moment, it was also the first time it had occurred. It might have been going on for months. She was perfectly aware that it could bring them to nothing, for one must lead one's own life ; it was impossible to lead the life of another, especially when that other was so different, so arbitrary and unscrupulous.

XXXIV

" I PRESUME you are the only person in this country who feels as you do," she observed at last.

" Not the only person who feels so, but very possibly the only person who thinks so. I have an idea that my convictions exist in a vague, unformulated state in the minds of a great many of my fellow-citizens. If I should succeed some day in giving them adequate expression I should simply put into shape the slumbering instincts of an important minority."

" I am glad you admit it's a minority ! " Verena exclaimed. " That's fortunate for us poor creatures. And what do you call adequate expression ? I presume you would like to be President of the United States ? "

" And breathe forth my views in glowing messages to a palpitating Senate ? That is exactly what I should like to be ; you read my aspirations wonderfully well."

" Well, do you consider that you have advanced far in that direction, as yet ? " Verena asked.

This question, with the tone in which it happened to be uttered, seemed to the young man to project rather an ironical light upon his present beggarly condition, so that for a moment he said nothing ; a moment during which if his neighbour had glanced

round at his face she would have seen it ornamented by an incipient blush. Her words had for him the effect of a sudden, though, on the part of a young woman who had of course every right to defend herself, a perfectly legitimate taunt. They appeared only to repeat in another form (so at least his exaggerated Southern pride, his hot sensibility, interpreted the matter) the idea that a gentleman so dreadfully backward in the path of fortune had no right to take up the time of a brilliant, successful girl, even for the purpose of satisfying himself that he renounced her. But the reminder only sharpened his wish to make her feel that if he had renounced, it was simply on account of that same ugly, accidental, outside backwardness; and if he had not, he went so far as to flatter himself, he might triumph over the whole accumulation of her prejudices—over all the bribes of her notoriety. The deepest feeling in Ransom's bosom in relation to her was the conviction that she was made for love, as he had said to himself while he listened to her at Mrs. Burrage's. She was profoundly unconscious of it, and another ideal, crude and thin and artificial, had interposed itself; but in the presence of a man she should really care for, this false, flimsy structure would rattle to her feet, and the emancipation of Olive Chancellor's sex (what sex was it, great heaven? he used profanely to ask himself) would be relegated to the land of vapours, of dead phrases. The reader may imagine whether such an impression as this made it any more agreeable to Basil to have to believe it would be indelicate in him to try to woo her. He would have resented immensely the imputation that he had done anything of that sort yet. "Ah, Miss Tarrant, my success in life is one thing—my ambition is another!" he exclaimed presently, in answer to her inquiry. "Nothing is more possible than that I may be poor

and unheard of all my days ; and in that case no one but myself will know the visions of greatness I have stifled and buried."

" Why do you talk of being poor and unheard of ? Aren't you getting on quite well in this city ? "

This question of Verena's left him no time, or at least no coolness, to remember that to Mrs. Luna and to Olive he had put a fine face on his prospects, and that any impression the girl might have about them was but the natural echo of what these ladies believed. It had to his ear such a subtly mocking, defiant, unconsciously injurious quality, that the only answer he could make to it seemed to him for the moment to be an outstretched arm, which, passing round her waist, should draw her so close to him as to enable him to give her a concise account of his situation in the form of a deliberate kiss. If the moment I speak of had lasted a few seconds longer I know not what monstrous proceeding of this kind it would have been my difficult duty to describe ; it was fortunately arrested by the arrival of a nursery-maid pushing a perambulator and accompanied by an infant who toddled in her wake. Both the nurse and her companion gazed fixedly, and it seemed to Ransom even sternly, at the striking couple on the bench ; and meanwhile Verena, looking with a quickened eye at the children (she adored children), went on—

" It sounds too flat for you to talk about your remaining unheard of. Of course you are ambitious ; any one can see that, to look at you. And once your ambition is excited in any particular direction, people had better look out. With your will ! " she added, with a curious mocking candour.

" What do you know about my will ? " he asked, laughing a little awkwardly, as if he had really attempted to kiss her—in the course of the second

independent interview he had ever had with her—and been rebuffed.

"I know it's stronger than mine. It made me come out, when I thought I had much better not, and it keeps me sitting here long after I should have started for home."

"Give me the day, dear Miss Tarrant, give me the day," Basil Ransom murmured; and as she turned her face upon him, moved by the expression of his voice, he added—"Come and dine with me, since you wouldn't lunch. Are you really not faint and weak?"

"I am faint and weak at all the horrible things you have said; I have lunched on abominations. And now you want me to dine with you? Thank you; I think you're cool!" Verena cried, with a laugh which her chronicler knows to have been expressive of some embarrassment, though Basil Ransom did not.

"You must remember that I have, on two different occasions, listened to you for an hour, in speechless, submissive attention, and that I shall probably do it a great many times more."

"Why should you ever listen to me again, when you loathe my ideas?"

"I don't listen to your ideas; I listen to your voice."

"Ah, I told Olive!" said Verena, quickly, as if his words had confirmed an old fear; which was general, however, and did not relate particularly to him.

Ransom still had an impression that he was not making love to her, especially when he could observe, with all the superiority of a man—"I wonder whether you have understood ten words I have said to you?"

"I should think you had made it clear enough—you had rubbed it in!"

" What have you understood, then ? "

" Why, that you want to put us back further than we have been at any period."

" I have been joking ; I have been piling it up," Ransom said, making that concession unexpectedly to the girl. Every now and then he had an air of relaxing himself, becoming absent, ceasing to care to discuss.

She was capable of noticing this, and in a moment she asked—" Why don't you write out your ideas ? "

This touched again upon the matter of his failure ; it was curious how she couldn't keep off it, hit it every time. " Do you mean for the public ? I have written many things, but I can't get them printed."

" Then it would seem that there are not so many people—so many as you said just now—who agree with you."

" Well," said Basil Ransom, " editors are a mean, timorous lot, always saying they want something original, but deadly afraid of it when it comes."

" Is it for papers, magazines ? " As it sank into Verena's mind more deeply that the contributions of this remarkable young man had been rejected—contributions in which, apparently, everything she held dear was riddled with scorn—she felt a strange pity and sadness, a sense of injustice. " I am very sorry you can't get published," she said, so simply that he looked up at her, from the figure he was scratching on the asphalt with his stick, to see whether such a tone as that, in relation to such a fact, were not " put on." But it was evidently genuine, and Verena added that she supposed getting published was very difficult always ; she remembered, though she didn't mention, how little success her father had when he tried. She hoped Mr. Ransom would keep on ; he would be sure to succeed at last. Then she continued, smiling, with more irony : " You

may denounce me by name if you like. Only please don't say anything about Olive Chancellor."

"How little you understand what I want to achieve!" Basil Ransom exclaimed. "There you are—you women—all over; always meaning, yourselves, something personal, and always thinking it is meant by others!"

"Yes, that's the charge they make," said Verena gaily.

"I don't want to touch you, or Miss Chancellor, or Mrs. Farrinder, or Miss Birdseye, or the shade of Eliza P. Moseley, or any other gifted and celebrated being on earth—or in heaven."

"Oh, I suppose you want to destroy us by neglect, by silence!" Verena exclaimed, with the same brightness.

"No, I don't want to destroy you, any more than I want to save you. There has been far too much talk about you, and I want to leave you alone altogether. My interest is in my own sex; yours evidently can look after itself. That's what I want to save."

Verena saw that he was more serious now than he had been before, that he was not piling it up satirically, but saying really and a trifle wearily, as if suddenly he were tired of much talk, what he meant. "To save it from what?" she asked.

"From the most damnable feminisation! I am so far from thinking, as you set forth the other night, that there is not enough women in our general life, that it has long been pressed home to me that there is a great deal too much. The whole generation is womanised; the masculine tone is passing out of the world; it's a feminine, a nervous, hysterical, chattering, canting age, an age of hollow phrases and false delicacy and exaggerated solicitudes and coddled sensibilities, which, if we don't soon look out, will

usher in the reign of mediocrity, of the feeblest and flattest and the most pretentious that has ever been. The masculine character, the ability to dare and endure, to know and yet not fear reality, to look the world in the face and take it for what it is—a very queer and partly very base mixture—that is what I want to preserve, or rather, as I may say, to recover ; and I must tell you that I don't in the least care what becomes of you ladies while I make the attempt ! "

The poor fellow delivered himself of these narrow notions (the rejection of which by leading periodicals was certainly not a matter for surprise) with low, soft earnestness, bending towards her so as to give out his whole idea, yet apparently forgetting for the moment how offensive it must be to her now that it was articulated in that calm, severe way, in which no allowance was to be made for hyperbole. Verena did not remind herself of this ; she was too much impressed by his manner and by the novelty of a man taking that sort of religious tone about such a cause. It told her on the spot, from one minute to the other and once for all, that the man who could give her that impression would never come round. She felt cold, slightly sick, though she replied that now he summed up his creed in such a distinct, lucid way, it was much more comfortable—one knew with what one was dealing ; a declaration much at variance with the fact, for Verena had never felt less gratified in her life. The ugliness of her companion's profession of faith made her shiver ; it would have been difficult to her to imagine anything more crudely profane. She was determined, however, not to betray any shudder that could suggest weakness, and the best way she could think of to disguise her emotion was to remark in a tone which, although not assumed for that purpose, was really the most effective revenge, inasmuch as it always produced on Ransom's part

(it was not peculiar, among women, to Verena) an angry helplessness—" Mr. Ransom, I assure you this is an age of conscience."

" That's a part of your cant. It's an age of unspeakable shams, as Carlyle says."

" Well," returned Verena, " it's all very comfortable for you to say that you wish to leave us alone. But you can't leave us alone. We are here, and we have got to be disposed of. You have got to put us somewhere. It's a remarkable social system that has no place for *us* ! " the girl went on, with her most charming laugh.

" No place in public. My plan is to keep you at home and have a better time with you there than ever."

" I'm glad it's to be better ; there's room for it. Woe to American womanhood when you start a movement for being more—what you like to be—at home ! "

" Lord, how you're perverted ; you, the very genius ! " Basil Ransom murmured, looking at her with the kindest eyes.

She paid no attention to this, she went on, " And those who have got no home (there are millions, you know), what are you going to do with *them* ? You must remember that women marry—are given in marriage—less and less ; that isn't their career, as a matter of course, any more. You can't tell them to go and mind their husband and children, when they have no husband and children to mind."

" Oh," said Ransom, " that's a detail ! And for myself, I confess, I have such a boundless appreciation of your sex in private life that I am perfectly ready to advocate a man's having a half-a-dozen wives."

" The civilisation of the Turks, then, strikes you as the highest ? "

"The Turks have a second-rate religion; they are fatalists, and that keeps them down. Besides, their women are not nearly so charming as ours—or as ours would be if this modern pestilence were eradicated. Think what a confession you make when you say that women are less and less sought in marriage; what a testimony that is to the pernicious effect on their manners, their person, their nature, of this fatuous agitation."

"That's very complimentary to me!" Verena broke in, lightly.

But Ransom was carried over her interruption by the current of his argument. "There are a thousand ways in which any woman, all women, married or single, may find occupation. They may find it in making society agreeable."

"Agreeable to men, of course."

"To whom else, pray? Dear Miss Tarrant, what is most agreeable to women is to be agreeable to men! That is a truth as old as the human race, and don't let Olive Chancellor persuade you that she and Mrs. Farrinder have invented any that can take its place, or that is more profound, more durable."

Verena waived this point of the discussion; she only said: "Well, I am glad to hear you are prepared to see the place all choked up with old maids!"

"I don't object to the *old* old maids; they were delightful; they had always plenty to do, and didn't wander about the world crying out for a vocation. It is the ~~new old maid~~ that you have invented from whom I pray to be delivered." He didn't say he meant Olive Chancellor, but Verena looked at him as if she suspected him of doing so; and to put her off that scent he went on, taking up what she had said a moment before: "As for its not being complimentary to you, my remark about the effect on the women themselves of this pernicious craze, my

dear Miss Tarrant, you may be quite at your ease. You stand apart, you are unique, extraordinary; you constitute a category by yourself. In you the elements have been mixed in a manner so felicitous that I regard you as quite incorruptible. I don't know where you come from nor how you come to be what you are, but you are outside and above all vulgarising influences. Besides, you ought to know," the young man proceeded, in the same cool, mild, deliberate tone, as if he were demonstrating a mathematical solution, "you ought to know that your connexion with all these rantings and ravings is the most unreal, accidental, illusory thing in the world. You think you care about them, but you don't at all. They were imposed upon you by circumstances, by unfortunate associations, and you accepted them as you would have accepted any other burden, on account of the sweetness of your nature. You always want to please some one, and now you go lecturing about the country, and trying to provoke demonstrations, in order to please Miss Chancellor, just as you did it before to please your father and mother. It isn't *you*, the least in the world, but an inflated little figure (very remarkable in its way too) whom you have invented and set on its feet, pulling strings, behind it, to make it move and speak, while you try to conceal and efface yourself there. Ah, Miss Tarrant, if it's a question of pleasing, how much you might please some one else by tipping your preposterous puppet over and standing forth in your freedom as well as in your loveliness!"

While Basil Ransom spoke—and he had not spoken just that way yet—Verena sat there deeply attentive, with her eyes on the ground; but as soon as he ceased she sprang to her feet—something made her feel that their association had already lasted quite too long. She turned away from him as if

she wished to leave him, and indeed were about to attempt to do so. She didn't desire to look at him now, or even to have much more conversation with him. "Something," I say, made her feel so, but it was partly his curious manner—so serene and explicit, as if he knew the whole thing to an absolute certainty —which partly scared her and partly made her feel angry. She began to move along the path to one of the gates, as if it were settled that they should immediately leave the place. He laid it all out so clearly; if he had had a revelation he couldn't speak otherwise. That description of herself as something different from what she was trying to be, the charge of want of reality, made her heart beat with pain; she was sure, at any rate, it was her real self that was there with him now, where she oughtn't to be. In a moment he was at her side again, going with her; and as they walked it came over her that some of the things he had said to her were far beyond what Olive could have imagined as the very worst possible. What would be her state now, poor forsaken friend, if some of them had been borne to her in the voices of the air? Verena had been affected by her companion's speech (his manner had changed so; it seemed to express something quite different) in a way that pushed her to throw up the discussion and determine that as soon as they should get out of the park she would go off by herself; but she still had her wits about her sufficiently to think it important she should give no sign of discomposure, of confessing that she was driven from the field. She appeared to herself to notice and reply to his extraordinary observations enough, without taking them up too much, when she said, tossing the words over her shoulder at Ransom, while she moved quickly: "I presume, from what you say, that you don't think I have much ability."

He hesitated before answering, while his long legs easily kept pace with her rapid step—her charming, touching, hurrying step, which expressed all the trepidation she was anxious to conceal. "Immense ability, but not in the line in which you most try to have it. In a very different line, Miss Tarrant! Ability is no word for it; it's genius!"

She felt his eyes on her face—ever so close and fixed there—after he had chosen to reply to her question that way. She was beginning to blush; if he had kept them longer, and on the part of any one else, she would have called such a stare impertinent. Verena had been commended of old by Olive for her serenity "while exposed to the gaze of hundreds"; but a change had taken place, and she was now unable to endure the contemplation of an individual. She wished to detach him, to lead him off again into the general; and for this purpose, at the end of a moment, she made another inquiry: "I am to understand, then, as your last word that you regard us as quite inferior?"

"For public, civic uses, absolutely—perfectly weak and second-rate. I know nothing more indicative of the muddled sentiment of the time than that any number of men should be found to pretend that they regard you in any other light. But privately, personally, it's another affair. In the realm of family life and the domestic affections——"

At this Verena broke in, with a nervous laugh, "Don't say that; it's only a phrase!"

"Well, it's a better one than any of yours," said Basil Ransom, turning with her out of one of the smaller gates—the first they had come to. They emerged into the species of *plaza* formed by the numbered street which constitutes the southern extremity of the park and the termination of the Sixth Avenue. The glow of the splendid afternoon

was over everything, and the day seemed to Ransom still in its youth. The bowers and boskages stretched behind them, the artificial lakes and cockneyfied landscapes, making all the region bright with the sense of air and space, and raw natural tints, and vegetation too diminutive to overshadow. The chocolate-coloured houses, in tall, new rows, surveyed the expanse ; the street cars rattled in the foreground, changing horses while the horses steamed, and absorbing and emitting passengers ; and the beer-saloons, with exposed shoulders and sides, which in New York do a good deal towards representing the picturesque, the " bit " appreciated by painters, announced themselves in signs of large lettering to the sky. Groups of the unemployed, the children of disappointment from beyond the seas, propped themselves against the low, sunny wall of the park ; and on the other side the commercial vista of the Sixth Avenue stretched away with a remarkable absence of aerial perspective.

" I must go home ; good-bye," Verena said, abruptly, to her companion.

" Go home ? You won't come and dine, then ? "

Verena knew people who dined at midday and others who dined in the evening, and others still who never dined at all ; but she knew no one who dined at half-past three. Ransom's attachment to this idea therefore struck her as queer and infelicitous, and she supposed it betrayed the habits of Mississippi. But that couldn't make it any more acceptable to her, in spite of his looking so disappointed—with his dimly-glowing eyes—that he was heedless for the moment that the main fact connected with her return to Tenth Street was that she wished to go alone.

" I must leave you, right away," she said. " Please don't ask me to stay ; you wouldn't if you knew how little I want to ! " Her manner was different now,

and her face as well, and though she smiled more than ever she had never seemed to him more serious.

"Alone, do you mean? Really I can't let you do that," Ransom replied, extremely shocked at this sacrifice being asked of him. "I have brought you this immense distance, I am responsible for you, and I must place you where I found you."

"Mr. Ransom, I must, I will!" she exclaimed, in a tone he had not yet heard her use; so that, a good deal amazed, puzzled and pained, he saw that he should make a mistake if he were to insist. He had known that their expedition must end in a separation which could not be sweet, but he had counted on making some of the terms of it himself. When he expressed the hope that she would at least allow him to put her into a car, she replied that she wished no car; she wanted to walk. This image of her "streaking off" by herself, as he figured it, did not mend the matter; but in the presence of her sudden nervous impatience he felt that here was a feminine mystery which must be allowed to take its course.

"It costs me more than you probably suspect, but I submit. Heaven guard you and bless you, Miss Tarrant!"

She turned her face away from him as if she were straining at a leash; then she rejoined, in the most unexpected manner: "I hope very much you *will* get printed."

"Get my articles published?" He stared, and broke out: "Oh, you delightful being!"

"Good-bye," she repeated; and now she gave him her hand. As he held it a moment, and asked her if she were really leaving the city so soon that she mightn't see him again, she answered: "If I stay it will be at a place to which you mustn't come. They wouldn't let you see me."

He had not intended to put that question to her;

he had set himself a limit. But the limit had suddenly moved on. "Do you mean at that house where I heard you speak?"

"I may go there for a few days."

"If it's forbidden to me to go and see you there, why did you send me a card?"

"Because I wanted to convert you then."

"And now you give me up?"

"No, no; I want you to remain as you are!"

She looked strange, with her more mechanical smile, as she said this, and he didn't know what idea was in her head. She had already left him, but he called after her, "If you do stay, I will come!" She neither turned nor made an answer, and all that was left to him was to watch her till she passed out of sight. Her back, with its charming young form, seemed to repeat that last puzzle, which was almost a challenge.

For this, however, Verena Tarrant had not meant it. She wanted, in spite of the greater delay and the way Olive would wonder, to walk home, because it gave her time to think, and think again, how glad she was (really, positively, *now*) that Mr. Ransom was on the wrong side. If he had been on the right——! She did not finish this proposition. She found Olive waiting for her in exactly the manner she had foreseen; she turned to her, as she came in, a face sufficiently terrible. Verena instantly explained herself, related exactly what she had been doing; then went on, without giving her friend time for question or comment: "And you—you paid your visit to Mrs. Burrage?"

"Yes, I went through that."

"And did she press the question of my coming there?"

"Very much indeed."

"And what did you say?"

"I said very little, but she gave me such assurances——"

"That you thought I ought to go?"

Olive was silent a moment; then she said: "She declares they are devoted to the cause, and that New York will be at your feet."

Verena took Miss Chancellor's shoulders in each of her hands, and gave her back, for an instant, her gaze, her silence. Then she broke out, with a kind of passion: "I don't care for her assurances—I don't care for New York! I won't go to them—I won't—do you understand?" Suddenly her voice changed, she passed her arms round her friend and buried her face in her neck. "Olive Chancellor, take me away, take me away!" she went on. In a moment Olive felt that she was sobbing and that the question was settled, the question she herself had debated in anguish a couple of hours before.

BOOK THIRD

XXXV

THE August night had gathered by the time Basil Ransom, having finished his supper, stepped out upon the piazza of the little hotel. It was a very little hotel and of a very slight and loose construction ; the tread of a tall Mississippian made the staircase groan and the windows rattle in their frames. He was very hungry when he arrived, having not had a moment, in Boston, on his way through, to eat even the frugal morsel with which he was accustomed to sustain nature between a breakfast that consisted of a cup of coffee and a dinner that consisted of a cup of tea. He had had his cup of tea now, and very bad it was, brought him by a pale, round-backed young lady, with auburn ringlets, a fancy belt, and an expression of limited tolerance for a gentleman who could not choose quickly between fried fish, fried steak, and baked beans. The train for Marmion left Boston at four o'clock in the afternoon, and rambled fitfully toward the southern cape, while the shadows grew long in the stony pastures and the slanting light gilded the straggling, shabby woods, and painted the ponds and marshes with yellow gleams. The ripeness of summer lay upon the land, and yet there was nothing in the country Basil Ransom traversed that seemed susceptible of maturity ; nothing but the apples in the little tough, dense orchards, which gave a suggestion of sour

fruition here and there, and the tall, bright golden-rod at the bottom of the bare stone dykes. There were no fields of yellow grain; only here and there a crop of brown hay. But there was a kind of soft scrubbiness in the landscape, and a sweetness begotten of low horizons, of mild air, with a possibility of summer haze, of unregarded inlets where on August mornings the water must be brightly blue. Ransom had heard that the Cape was the Italy, so to speak, of Massachusetts; it had been described to him as the drowsy Cape, the languid Cape, the Cape not of storms, but of eternal peace. He knew that the Bostonians had been drawn thither, for the hot weeks, by its sedative influence, by the conviction that its toneless air would minister to perfect rest. In a career in which there was so much nervous excitement as in theirs they had no wish to be wound up when they went out of town; they were sufficiently wound up at all times by the sense of all their sex had been through. They wanted to live idly, to unbend and lie in hammocks, and also to keep out of the crowd, the rush of the watering-place. Ransom could see there was no crowd at Marmion, as soon as he got there, though indeed there was a rush, which directed itself to the only vehicle in waiting outside of the small, lonely, hut-like station, so distant from the village that, as far as one looked along the sandy, sketchy road which was supposed to lead to it, one saw only an empty land on either side. Six or eight men in "dusters," carrying parcels and handbags, projected themselves upon the solitary, rickety carry-all, so that Ransom could read his own fate, while the ruminating conductor of the vehicle, a lean, shambling citizen, with a long neck and a tuft on his chin, guessed that if he wanted to get to the hotel before dusk he would have to strike out. His valise was attached in a

precarious manner to the rear of the carry-all. "Well, I'll chance it," the driver remarked sadly, when Ransom protested against its insecure position. He recognised the southern quality of that picturesque fatalism—judged that Miss Chancellor and Verena Tarrant must be pretty thoroughly relaxed if they had given themselves up to the genius of the place. This was what he hoped for and counted on, as he took his way, the sole pedestrian in the group that had quitted the train, in the wake of the overladen carry-all. It helped him to enjoy the first country walk he had had for many months, for more than months, for years, that the reflexion was forced upon him as he went (the mild, vague scenery, just beginning to be dim with twilight, suggested it at every step) that the two young women who constituted, at Marmion, his whole prefigurement of a social circle, must, in such a locality as that, be taking a regular holiday. The sense of all the wrongs they had still to redress must be lighter there than it was in Boston; the ardent young man had, for the hour, an ingenuous hope that they had left their opinions in the city. He liked the very smell of the soil as he wandered along; cool, soft whiffs of evening met him at bends of the road which disclosed very little more—unless it might be a band of straight-stemmed woodland, keeping, a little, the red glow from the west, or (as he went further) an old house, shingled all over, grey and slightly collapsing, which looked down at him from a steep bank, at the top of wooden steps. He was already refreshed; he had tasted the breath of nature, measured his long grind in New York, without a vacation, with the repetition of the daily movement up and down the long, straight, maddening city, like a bucket in a well or a shuttle in a loom.

He lit his cigar in the office of the hotel—a small

room on the right of the door, where a "register," meagrely inscribed, led a terribly public life on the little bare desk, and got its pages dogs'-eared before they were covered. Local worthies, of a vague identity, used to lounge there, as Ransom perceived the next day, by the hour. They tipped back their chairs against the wall, seldom spoke, and might have been supposed, with their converging vision, to be watching something out of the window, if there had been anything at Marmion to watch. Sometimes one of them got up and went to the desk, on which he leaned his elbows, hunching a pair of sloping shoulders to an uncollared neck. For the fiftieth time he perused the fly-blown page of the recording volume, where the names followed each other with such jumps of date. The others watched him while he did so—or contemplated in silence some "guest" of the hostelry, when such a personage entered the place with an air of appealing from the general irresponsibility of the establishment and found no one but the village-philosophers to address himself to. It was an establishment conducted by invisible, elusive agencies; they had a kind of stronghold in the dining-room, which was kept locked at all but sacramental hours. There was a tradition that a "boy" exercised some tutelary function as regards the crumpled register; but when he was inquired about, it was usually elicited from the impartial circle in the office either that he was somewhere round or that he had gone a-fishing. Except the haughty waitress who has just been mentioned as giving Ransom his supper, and who only emerged at meal-times from her mystic seclusion, this impalpable youth was the single person on the premises who represented domestic service. Anxious lady-boarders, wrapped in shawls, were seen waiting for him, as if he had been the doctor, on horse-hair rocking-chairs,

in the little public parlour; others peered vaguely out of back doors and windows, thinking that if he were somewhere round they might see him. Sometimes people went to the door of the dining-room and tried it, shaking it a little, timidly, to see if it would yield; then, finding it fast, came away, looking, if they had been observed, shy and snubbed, at their fellows. Some of them went so far as to say that they didn't think it was a very good hotel.

Ransom, however, didn't much care whether it were good or not; he hadn't come to Marmion for the love of the hotel. Now that he had got there, however, he didn't know exactly what to do; his course seemed rather less easy than it had done when, suddenly, the night before, tired, sick of the city-air, and hungry for a holiday, he decided to take the next morning's train to Boston, and there take another to the shores of Buzzard's Bay. The hotel itself offered few resources; the inmates were not numerous; they moved about a little outside, on the small piazza and in the rough yard which interposed between the house and the road, and then they dropped off into the unmitigated dusk. This element, touched only in two or three places by a far-away dim glimmer, presented itself to Ransom as his sole entertainment. Though it was pervaded by that curious, pure, earthy smell which in New England, in summer, hangs in the nocturnal air, Ransom bethought himself that the place might be a little dull for persons who had not come to it, as he had, to take possession of Verena Tarrant. The unfriendly inn, which suggested dreadfully to Ransom (he despised the practice) an early bed-time, seemed to have no relation to anything, not even to itself; but a fellow-tenant of whom he made an inquiry told him the village was sprinkled round. Basil presently walked along the road in search of it, under the

stars, smoking one of the good cigars which constituted his only tribute to luxury. He reflected that it would hardly do to begin his attack that night; he ought to give the Bostonians a certain amount of notice of his appearance on the scene. He thought it very possible, indeed, that they might be addicted to the vile habit of "retiring" with the cocks and hens. He was sure that was one of the things Olive Chancellor would do so long as he should stay—on purpose to spite him; she would make Verena Tarrant go to bed at unnatural hours, just to deprive him of his evenings. He walked some distance without encountering a creature or discerning an habitation; but he enjoyed the splendid starlight, the stillness, the shrill melancholy of the crickets, which seemed to make all the vague forms of the country pulsate around him; the whole impression was a bath of freshness after the long strain of the preceding two years and his recent sweltering weeks in New York. At the end of ten minutes (his stroll had been slow) a figure drew near him, at first indistinct, but presently defining itself as that of a woman. She was walking apparently without purpose, like himself, or without other purpose than that of looking at the stars, which she paused for an instant, throwing back her head, to contemplate, as he drew nearer to her. In a moment he was very close; he saw her look at him, through the clear gloom, as they passed each other. She was small and slim; he made out her head and face, saw that her hair was cropped; had an impression of having seen her before. He noticed that as she went by she turned as well as himself, and that there was a sort of recognition in her movement. Then he felt sure that he had seen her elsewhere, and before she had added to the distance that separated them he stopped short, looking after her. She noticed his

halt, paused equally, and for a moment they stood there face to face, at a certain interval, in the darkness.

"I beg your pardon—is it Doctor Prance?" he found himself demanding.

For a minute there was no answer; then came the voice of the little lady:

"Yes, sir; I am Doctor Prance. Any one sick at the hotel?"

"I hope not; I don't know," Ransom said, laughing.

Then he took a few steps, mentioned his name, recalled his having met her at Miss Birdseye's, ever so long before (nearly two years), and expressed the hope that she had not forgotten that.

She thought it over a little—she was evidently addicted neither to empty phrases nor to unconsidered assertions. "I presume you mean that night Miss Tarrant launched out so."

"That very night. We had a very interesting conversation."

"Well, I remember I lost a good deal," said Doctor Prance.

"Well, I don't know; I have an idea you made it up in other ways," Ransom returned, laughing still.

He saw her bright little eyes engage with his own. Staying, apparently, in the village, she had come out, bareheaded, for an evening walk, and if it had been possible to imagine Doctor Prance bored and in want of recreation, the way she lingered there as if she were quite willing to have another talk might have suggested to Basil Ransom this condition. "Why, don't you consider her career very remarkable?"

"Oh yes; everything is remarkable nowadays; we live in an age of wonders!" the young man replied, much amused to find himself discussing the object of his adoration in this casual way, in the dark,

on a lonely country-road, with a short-haired female physician. It was astonishing how quickly Doctor Prance and he had made friends again. "I suppose, by the way, you know Miss Tarrant and Miss Chancellor are staying down here?" he went on.

"Well, yes, I suppose I know it. I am visiting Miss Chancellor," the dry little woman added.

"Oh indeed? I am delighted to hear it!" Ransom exclaimed, feeling that he might have a friend in the camp. "Then you can inform me where those ladies have their house."

"Yes, I guess I can tell it in the dark. I will show you round now, if you like."

"I shall be glad to see it, though I am not sure I shall go in immediately. I must reconnoitre a little first. That makes me so very happy to have met you. I think it's very wonderful—your knowing me."

Doctor Prance did not repudiate this compliment, but she presently observed: "You didn't pass out of my mind entirely, because I have heard about you since, from Miss Birdseye."

"Ah yes, I saw her in the spring. I hope she is in health and happiness."

"She is always in happiness, but she can't be said to be in health. She is very weak; she is failing."

"I am very sorry for that."

"She is also visiting Miss Chancellor," Doctor Prance observed, after a pause which was an illustration of an appearance she had of thinking that certain things didn't at all imply some others.

"Why, my cousin has got all the distinguished women!" Basil Ransom exclaimed.

"Is Miss Chancellor your cousin? There isn't much family resemblance. Miss Birdseye came down for the benefit of the country air, and I came down

to see if I could help her to get some good from it. She wouldn't much, if she were left to herself. Miss Birdseye has a very fine character, but she hasn't much idea of hygiene." Doctor Prance was evidently more and more disposed to be chatty. Ransom appreciated this fact, and said he hoped she, too, was getting some good from the country-air—he was afraid she was very much confined to her profession, in Boston ; to which she replied—" Well, I was just taking a little exercise along the road. I presume you don't realise what it is to be one of four ladies grouped together in a small frame-house."

Ransom remembered how he had liked her before, and he felt that, as the phrase was, he was going to like her again. He wanted to express his good-will to her, and would greatly have enjoyed being at liberty to offer her a cigar. He didn't know what to offer her or what to do, unless he should invite her to sit with him on a fence. He did realise perfectly what the situation in the small frame-house must be, and entered with instant sympathy into the feelings which had led Doctor Prance to detach herself from the circle and wander forth under the constellations, all of which he was sure she knew. He asked her permission to accompany her on her walk, but she said she was not going much further in that direction ; she was going to turn round. He turned round with her, and they went back together to the village, in which he at last began to discover a certain consistency, signs of habitation, houses disposed with a rough resemblance to a plan. The road wandered among them with a kind of accommodating sinuosity, and there were even cross-streets, and an oil-lamp on a corner, and here and there the small sign of a closed shop, with an indistinctly countrified lettering. There were lights now in the windows of some of the houses, and

Doctor Prance mentioned to her companion several of the inhabitants of the little town, who appeared all to rejoice in the prefix of captain. They were retired shipmasters; there was quite a little nest of these worthies, two or three of whom might be seen lingering in their dim doorways, as if they were conscious of a want of encouragement to sit up, and yet remembered the nights in far-away waters when they would not have thought of turning in at all. Marmion called itself a town, but it was a good deal shrunken since the decline in the shipbuilding interest; it turned out a good many vessels every year, in the palmy days, before the war. There were shipyards still, where you could almost pick up the old shavings, the old nails and rivets, but they were grass-grown now, and the water lapped them without anything to interfere. There was a kind of arm of the sea put in; it went up some way, it wasn't the real sea, but very quiet, like a river; that was more attractive to some. Doctor Prance didn't say the place was picturesque, or quaint, or weird; but he could see that was what she meant when she said it was moldering away. Even under the mantle of night he himself gathered the impression that it had had a larger life, seen better days. Doctor Prance made no remark designed to elicit from him an account of his motives in coming to Marmion; she asked him neither when he had arrived nor how long he intended to stay. His allusion to his cousinship with Miss Chancellor might have served to her mind as a reason; yet, on the other hand, it would have been open to her to wonder why, if he had come to see the young ladies from Charles Street, he was not in more of a hurry to present himself. It was plain Doctor Prance didn't go into that kind of analysis. If Ransom had complained to her of a sore throat she would have inquired with precision about his

symptoms; but she was incapable of asking him any question with a social bearing. Sociably enough, however, they continued to wander through the principal street of the little town, darkened in places by immense old elms, which made a blackness overhead. There was a salt smell in the air, as if they were nearer the water; Doctor Prance said that Olive's house was at the other end.

"I shall take it as a kindness if, for this evening, you don't mention that you have happened to meet me," Ransom remarked, after a little. He had changed his mind about giving notice.

"Well, I wouldn't," his companion replied; as if she didn't need any caution in regard to making vain statements.

"I want to keep my arrival a little surprise for to-morrow. It will be a great pleasure to me to see Miss Birdseye," he went on, rather hypocritically, as if that at bottom had been to his mind the main attraction of Marmion.

Doctor Prance did not reveal her private comment, whatever it was, on this intimation; she only said, after some hesitation—"Well, I presume the old lady will take quite an interest in your being here."

"I have no doubt she is capable even of that degree of philanthropy."

"Well, she has charity for all, but she does—even she—prefer her own side. She regards you as quite an acquisition."

Ransom could not but feel flattered at the idea that he had been a subject of conversation—as this implied—in the little circle at Miss Chancellor's; but he was at a loss, for the moment, to perceive what he had done up to this time to gratify the senior member of the group. "I hope she will find me an acquisition after I have been here a few days," he said, laughing.

"Well, she thinks you are one of the most important converts yet," Doctor Prance replied, in a colourless way, as if she would not have pretended to explain why.

"A convert — me? Do you mean of Miss Tarrant's?" It had come over him that Miss Birdseye, in fact, when he was parting with her after their meeting in Boston, had assented to his request for secrecy (which at first had struck her as somewhat unholy) on the ground that Verena would bring him into the fold. He wondered whether that young lady had been telling her old friend that she had succeeded with him. He thought this improbable; but it didn't matter, and he said, gaily, "Well, I can easily let her suppose so!"

It was evident that it would be no easier for Doctor Prance to subscribe to a deception than it had been for her venerable patient; but she went so far as to reply, "Well, I hope you won't let her suppose you are where you were that time I conversed with you. I could see where you were then!"

"It was in about the same place you were, wasn't it?"

"Well," said Doctor Prance, with a small sigh, "I am afraid I have moved back, if anything!" Her sigh told him a good deal; it seemed a thin, self-controlled protest against the tone of Miss Chancellor's interior, of which it was her present fortune to form a part: and the way she hovered round, indistinct in the gloom, as if she were rather loath to resume her place there, completed his impression that the little doctress had a line of her own.

"That, at least, must distress Miss Birdseye," he said reproachfully.

"Not much, because I am not of importance. They think women the equals of men; but they are

a great deal more pleased when a man joins than when a woman does."

Ransom complimented Doctor Prance on the lucidity of her mind, and then he said: "Is Miss Birdseye really sick? Is her condition very precarious?"

"Well, she is very old, and very—very gentle," Doctor Prance answered, hesitating a moment for her adjective. "Under those circumstances a person may flicker out."

"We must trim the lamp," said Ransom; "I will take my turn, with pleasure, in watching the sacred flame."

"It will be a pity if she doesn't live to hear Miss Tarrant's great effort," his companion went on.

"Miss Tarrant's? What's that?"

"Well, it's the principal interest, in there." And Doctor Prance now vaguely indicated, with a movement of her head, a small white house, much detached from its neighbours, which stood on their left, with its back to the water, at a little distance from the road. It exhibited more signs of animation than any of its fellows; several windows, notably those of the ground floor, were open to the warm evening, and a large shaft of light was projected upon the grassy wayside in front of it. Ransom, in his determination to be discreet, checked the advance of his companion, who added presently, with a short, suppressed laugh—"You can see it is, from that!" He listened, to ascertain what she meant, and after an instant a sound came to his ear—a sound he knew already well, which carried the accents of Verena Tarrant, in ample periods and cadences, out into the stillness of the August night.

"Murder, what a lovely voice!" he exclaimed involuntarily.

Doctor Prance's eye gleamed towards him a

moment, and she observed, humorously (she was relaxing immensely), "Perhaps Miss Birdseye is right!" Then, as he made no rejoinder, only listening to the vocal inflexions that floated out of the house, she went on—"She's practising her speech."

"Her speech? Is she going to deliver one here?"

"No, as soon as they go back to town—at the Music Hall."

Ransom's attention was now transferred to his companion. "Is that why you call it her great effort?"

"Well, so they think it, I believe. She practises that way every night; she reads portions of it aloud to Miss Chancellor and Miss Birdseye."

"And that's the time you choose for your walk?" Ransom said, smiling.

"Well, it's the time my old lady has least need of me; she's too absorbed."

Doctor Prance dealt in facts; Ransom had already discovered that; and some of her facts were very interesting.

"The Music Hall—isn't that your great building?" he asked.

"Well, it's the biggest we've got; it's pretty big, but it isn't so big as Miss Chancellor's ideas," added Doctor Prance. "She has taken it to bring out Miss Tarrant before the general public—she has never appeared that way in Boston—on a great scale. She expects her to make a big sensation. It will be a great night, and they are preparing for it. They consider it her real beginning."

"And this is the preparation?" Basil Ransom said.

"Yes; as I say, it's their principal interest."

Ransom listened, and while he listened he meditated. He had thought it possible Verena's principles might have been shaken by the profession of faith

to which he treated her in New York ; but this hardly looked like it. For some moments Doctor Prance and he stood together in silence.

" You don't hear the words," the doctor remarked, with a smile which, in the dark, looked Mephistophelean.

" Oh, I know the words ! " the young man exclaimed, with rather a groan, as he offered her his hand for good-night.

XXXVI

A CERTAIN prudence had determined him to put off his visit till the morning ; he thought it more probable that at that time he should be able to see Verena alone, whereas in the evening the two young women would be sure to be sitting together. When the morrow dawned, however, Basil Ransom felt none of the trepidation of the procrastinator ; he knew nothing of the reception that awaited him, but he took his way to the cottage designated to him overnight by Doctor Prance, with the step of a man much more conscious of his own purpose than of possible obstacles. He made the reflexion, as he went, that to see a place for the first time at night is like reading a foreign author in a translation. At the present hour—it was getting towards eleven o'clock—he felt that he was dealing with the original. The little straggling, loosely-clustered town lay along the edge of a blue inlet, on the other side of which was a low, wooded shore, with a gleam of white sand where it touched the water. The narrow bay carried the vision outward to a picture that seemed at once bright and dim—a shining, slumbering summer sea, and a far-off, circling line of coast, which, under the August sun, was hazy and delicate. Ransom regarded the place as a town because Doctor Prance had called it one ; but it was a town where you smelt the breath of the hay in the streets and you might gather black-

berries in the principal square. The houses looked at each other across the grass—low, rusty, crooked, distended houses, with dry, cracked faces and the dim eyes of small-paned, stiffly-sliding windows. Their little door-yards bristled with rank, old-fashioned flowers, mostly yellow; and on the quarter that stood back from the sea the fields sloped upward, and the woods in which they presently lost themselves looked down over the roofs. Bolts and bars were not a part of the domestic machinery of Marmion, and the responsive menial, receiving the visitor on the threshold, was a creature rather desired than definitely possessed; so that Basil Ransom found Miss Chancellor's house-door gaping wide (as he had seen it the night before), and destitute even of a knocker or a bell-handle. From where he stood in the porch he could see the whole of the little sitting-room on the left of the hall—see that it stretched straight through to the back windows; that it was garnished with photographs of foreign works of art, pinned upon the walls, and enriched with a piano and other little extemporised embellishments, such as ingenious women lavish upon the houses they hire for a few weeks. Verena told him afterwards that Olive had taken her cottage furnished, but that the paucity of chairs and tables and bedsteads was such that their little party used almost to sit down, to lie down, in turn. On the other hand they had all George Eliot's writings, and two photographs of the Sistine Madonna. Ransom rapped with his stick on the lintel of the door, but no one came to receive him; so he made his way into the parlour, where he observed that his cousin Olive had as many German books as ever lying about. He dipped into this literature, momentarily, according to his wont, and then remembered that this was not what he had come for and that as he waited at the door he had

seen, through another door, opening at the opposite end of the hall, signs of a small verandah attached to the other face of the house. Thinking the ladies might be assembled there in the shade, he pushed aside the muslin curtain of the back window, and saw that the advantages of Miss Chancellor's summer residence were in this quarter. There was a verandah, in fact, to which a wide, horizontal trellis, covered with an ancient vine, formed a kind of extension. Beyond the trellis was a small, lonely garden ; beyond the garden was a large, vague, woody space, where a few piles of old timber were disposed, and which he afterwards learned to be a relic of the shipbuilding era described to him by Doctor Prance ; and still beyond this again was the charming lake-like estuary he had already admired. His eyes did not rest upon the distance ; they were attracted by a figure seated under the trellis, where the chequers of sun, in the interstices of the vine leaves, fell upon a bright-coloured rug spread out on the ground. The floor of the roughly-constructed verandah was so low that there was virtually no difference in the level. It took Ransom only a moment to recognise Miss Birdseye, though her back was turned to the house. She was alone ; she sat there motionless (she had a newspaper in her lap, but her attitude was not that of a reader), looking at the shimmering bay. She might be asleep ; that was why Ransom moderated the process of his long legs as he came round through the house to join her. This precaution represented his only scruple. He stepped across the verandah and stood close to her, but she did not appear to notice him. Visibly, she was dozing, or presumably, rather, for her head was enveloped in an old faded straw hat, which concealed the upper part of her face. There were two or three other chairs near her, and a table on which were half-a-dozen books and

periodicals, together with a glass containing a colourless liquid, on the top of which a spoon was laid. Ransom desired only to respect her repose, so he sat down in one of the chairs and waited till she should become aware of his presence. He thought Miss Chancellor's back-garden a delightful spot, and his jaded senses tasted the breeze—the idle, wandering summer wind—that stirred the vine leaves over his head. The hazy shores on the other side of the water, which had tints more delicate than the street vistas of New York (they seemed powdered with silver, a sort of midsummer light), suggested to him a land of dreams, a country in a picture. Basil Ransom had seen very few pictures, there were none in Mississippi; but he had a vision at times of something that would be more refined than the real world, and the situation in which he now found himself pleased him almost as much as if it had been a striking work of art. He was unable to see, as I have said, whether Miss Birdseye were taking in the prospect through open or only, imagination aiding (she had plenty of that), through closed, tired, dazzled eyes. She appeared to him, as the minutes elapsed and he sat beside her, the incarnation of well-earned rest, of patient, submissive superannuation. At the end of her long day's work she might have been placed there to enjoy this dim prevision of the peaceful river, the gleaming shores, of the paradise her unselfish life had certainly qualified her to enter, and which, apparently, would so soon be opened to her. After a while she said, placidly, without turning:

"I suppose it's about time I should take my remedy again. It does seem as if she had found the right thing; don't you think so?"

"Do you mean the contents of that tumbler? I shall be delighted to give it to you, and you must tell me how much you take." And Basil Ransom,

getting up, possessed himself of the glass on the table.

At the sound of his voice Miss Birdseye pushed back her straw hat by a movement that was familiar to her, and twisting about her muffled figure a little (even in August she felt the cold, and had to be much covered up to sit out), directed at him a speculative, unastonished gaze.

"One spoonful—two?" Ransom asked, stirring the dose and smiling.

"Well, I guess I'll take two this time."

"Certainly, Doctor Prance couldn't help finding the right thing," Ransom said, as he administered the medicine; while the movement with which she extended her face to take it made her seem doubly childlike.

He put down the glass, and she relapsed into her position; she seemed to be considering. "It's homœopathic," she remarked, in a moment.

"Oh, I have no doubt of that; I presume you wouldn't take anything else."

"Well, it's generally admitted now to be the true system."

Ransom moved closer to her, placed himself where she could see him better. "It's a great thing to have the true system," he said, bending towards her in a friendly way; "I'm sure you have it in everything." He was not often hypocritical; but when he was he went all lengths.

"Well, I don't know that any one has a right to say that. I thought you were Verena," she added in a moment, taking him in again with her mild, deliberate vision.

"I have been waiting for you to recognise me; of course you didn't know I was here—I only arrived last night."

"Well, I'm glad you have come to see Olive now."

"You remember that I wouldn't do that when I met you last?"

"You asked me not to mention to her that I had met you; that's what I principally recall."

"And don't you remember what I told you I wanted to do? I wanted to go out to Cambridge and see Miss Tarrant. Thanks to the information that you were so good as to give me, I was able to do so."

"Yes, she gave me quite a little description of your visit," said Miss Birdseye, with a smile and a vague sound in her throat—a sort of pensive, private reference to the idea of laughter—of which Ransom never learned the exact significance, though he retained for a long time afterwards a kindly memory of the old lady's manner at the moment.

"I don't know how much she enjoyed it, but it was an immense pleasure to me; so great a one that, as you see, I have come to call upon her again."

"Then, I presume, she *has* shaken you?"

"She has shaken me tremendously!" said Ransom, laughing.

"Well, you'll be a great addition," Miss Birdseye returned. "And this time your visit is also for Miss Chancellor?"

"That depends on whether she will receive me."

"Well, if she knows you are shaken, that will go a great way," said Miss Birdseye, a little musingly, as if even to her unsophisticated mind it had been manifested that one's relations with Miss Chancellor might be ticklish. "But she can't receive you now—can she?—because she's out. She has gone to the post office for the Boston letters, and they get so many every day that she had to take Verena with her to help her carry them home. One of them wanted to stay with me, because Doctor Prance has gone fishing, but I said I presumed I could be left

alone for about seven minutes. I know how they love to be together; it seems as if one *couldn't* go out without the other. That's what they came down here for, because it's quiet, and it didn't look as if there was any one else they would be much drawn to. So it would be a pity for me to come down after them just to spoil it!"

"I am afraid I shall spoil it, Miss Birdseye."

"Oh, well, a gentleman," murmured the ancient woman.

"Yes, what can you expect of a gentleman? I certainly shall spoil it if I can."

"You had better go fishing with Doctor Prance," said Miss Birdseye, with a serenity which showed that she was far from measuring the sinister quality of the announcement he had just made.

"I shan't object to that at all. The days here must be very long—very full of hours. Have you got the doctor with you?" Ransom inquired, as if he knew nothing at all about her.

"Yes, Miss Chancellor invited us both; she is very thoughtful. She is not merely a theoretic philanthropist—she goes into details," said Miss Birdseye, presenting her large person, in her chair, as if she herself were only an item. "It seems as if we were not so much wanted in Boston, just in August."

"And here you sit and enjoy the breeze, and admire the view," the young man remarked, wondering when the two messengers, whose seven minutes must long since have expired, would return from the post office.

"Yes, I enjoy everything in this little old-world place; I didn't suppose I should be satisfied to be so passive. It's a great contrast to my former exertions. But somehow it doesn't seem as if there were any trouble, or any wrong round here; and

if there should be, there are Miss Chancellor and Miss Tarrant to look after it. They seem to think I had better fold my hands. Besides, when helpful, generous minds begin to flock in from *your* part of the country," Miss Birdseye continued, looking at him from under the distorted and discoloured canopy of her hat with a benignity which completed the idea in any cheerful sense he chose.

He felt by this time that he was committed to rather a dishonest part; he was pledged not to give a shock to her optimism. This might cost him, in the coming days, a good deal of dissimulation, but he was now saved from any further expenditure of ingenuity by certain warning sounds which admonished him that he must keep his wits about him for a purpose more urgent. There were voices in the hall of the house, voices he knew, which came nearer, quickly; so that before he had time to rise one of the speakers had come out with the exclamation—"Dear Miss Birdseye, here are seven letters for you!" The words fell to the ground, indeed, before they were fairly spoken, and when Ransom got up, turning, he saw Olive Chancellor standing there, with the parcel from the post office in her hand. She stared at him in sudden horror; for the moment her self-possession completely deserted her. There was so little of any greeting in her face save the greeting of dismay, that he felt there was nothing for him to say to her, nothing that could mitigate the odious fact of his being there. He could only let her take it in, let her divine that, this time, he was not to be got rid of. In an instant—to ease off the situation—he held out his hand for Miss Birdseye's letters, and it was a proof of Olive's having turned rather faint and weak that she gave them up to him. He delivered the packet to the old lady, and now Verena had appeared in the doorway of the house.

As soon as she saw him, she blushed crimson; but she did not, like Olive, stand voiceless.

"Why, Mr. Ransom," she cried out, "where in the world were *you* washed ashore?" Miss Birdseye, meanwhile, taking her letters, had no appearance of observing that the encounter between Olive and her visitor was a kind of concussion.

It was Verena who eased off the situation; her gay challenge rose to her lips as promptly as if she had had no cause for embarrassment. She was not confused even when she blushed, and her alertness may perhaps be explained by the habit of public speaking. Ransom smiled at her while she came forward, but he spoke first to Olive, who had already turned her eyes away from him and gazed at the blue sea-view as if she were wondering what was going to happen to her at last.

"Of course you are very much surprised to see me; but I hope to be able to induce you to regard me not absolutely in the light of an intruder. I found your door open, and I walked in, and Miss Birdseye seemed to think I might stay. Miss Birdseye, I put myself under your protection; I invoke you; I appeal to you," the young man went on. "Adopt me, answer for me, cover me with the mantle of your charity!"

Miss Birdseye looked up from her letters, as if at first she had only faintly heard his appeal. She turned her eyes from Olive to Verena; then she said, "Doesn't it seem as if we had room for all? When I remember what I have seen in the South, Mr. Ransom's being here strikes me as a great triumph."

Olive evidently failed to understand, and Verena broke in with eagerness, "It was by my letter, of course, that you knew we were here. The one I wrote just before we came, Olive," she went on. "Don't you remember I showed it to you?"

At the mention of this act of submission on her friend's part Olive started, flashing her a strange look; then she said to Basil that she didn't see why he should explain so much about his coming; every one had a right to come. It was a very charming place; it ought to do any one good. "But it will have one defect for you," she added; "three-quarters of the summer residents are women!"

This attempted pleasantry on Miss Chancellor's part, so unexpected, so incongruous, uttered with white lips and cold eyes, struck Ransom to that degree by its oddity that he could not resist exchanging a glance of wonder with Verena, who, if she had had the opportunity, could probably have explained to him the phenomenon. Olive had recovered herself, reminded herself that she was safe, that her companion in New York had repudiated, denounced her pursuer; and, as a proof to her own sense of her security, as well as a touching mark to Verena that now, after what had passed, she had no fear, she felt that a certain light mockery would be effective.

"Ah, Miss Olive, don't pretend to think I love your sex so little, when you know that what you really object to in me is that I love it too much!" Ransom was not brazen, he was not impudent, he was really a very modest man; but he was aware that whatever he said or did he was condemned to seem impudent now, and he argued within himself that if he was to have the dishonour of being thought brazen he might as well have the comfort. He didn't care a straw, in truth, how he was judged or how he might offend; he had a purpose which swallowed up such inanities as that, and he was so full of it that it kept him firm, balanced him, gave him an assurance that might easily have been confounded with a cold detachment. "This place will do me good," he pursued; "I haven't had a holiday for

more than two years, I couldn't have gone another day; I was finished. I would have written to you beforehand that I was coming, but I only started at a few hours' notice. It occurred to me that this would be just what I wanted; I remembered what Miss Tarrant had said in her note, that it was a place where people could lie on the ground and wear their old clothes. I delight to lie on the ground, and all my clothes are old. I hope to be able to stay three or four weeks."

Olive listened till he had done speaking; she stood a single moment longer, and then, without a word, a glance, she rushed into the house. Ransom saw that Miss Birdseye was immersed in her letters; so he went straight to Verena and stood before her, looking far into her eyes. He was not smiling now, as he had been in speaking to Olive. "Will you come somewhere apart, where I can speak to you alone?"

"Why have you done this? It was not right in you to come!" Verena looked still as if she were blushing, but Ransom perceived he must allow for her having been delicately scorched by the sun.

"I have come because it is necessary—because I have something very important to say to you. A great number of things."

"The same things you said in New York? I don't want to hear them again—they were horrible!"

"No, not the same—different ones. I want you to come out with me, away from here."

"You always want me to come out! We can't go out here; we *are* out, as much as we can be!" Verena laughed. She tried to turn it off—feeling that something really impended.

"Come down into the garden, and out beyond there—to the water, where we can speak. It's what I have come for; it was not for what I told Miss Olive!"

He had lowered his voice, as if Miss Olive might still hear them, and there was something strangely grave — altogether solemn, indeed — in its tone. Verena looked around her, at the splendid summer day, at the much-swathed, formless figure of Miss Birdseye, holding her letter inside her hat. "Mr. Ransom!" she articulated then, simply; and as her eyes met his again they showed him a couple of tears.

"It's not to make you suffer, I honestly believe. I don't want to say anything that will hurt you. How can I possibly hurt you, when I feel to you as I do?" he went on, with suppressed force.

She said no more, but all her face entreated him to let her off, to spare her; and as this look deepened, a quick sense of elation and success began to throb in his heart, for it told him exactly what he wanted to know. It told him that she was afraid of him, that she had ceased to trust herself, that the way he had read her nature was the right way (she was tremendously open to attack, she was meant for love, she was meant for him), and that his arriving at the point at which he wished to arrive was only a question of time. This happy consciousness made him extraordinarily tender to her; he couldn't put enough reassurance into his smile, his low murmur, as he said: "Only give me ten minutes; don't receive me by turning me away. It's my holiday— my poor little holiday; don't spoil it."

Three minutes later Miss Birdseye, looking up from her letter, saw them move together through the bristling garden and traverse a gap in the old fence which enclosed the further side of it. They passed into the ancient shipyard which lay beyond, and which was now a mere vague, grass-grown approach to the waterside, bestrewn with a few remnants of supererogatory timber. She saw them stroll

forward to the edge of the bay and stand there, taking the soft breeze in their faces. She watched them a little, and it warmed her heart to see the stiff-necked young Southerner led captive by a daughter of New England trained in the right school, who would impose her opinions in their integrity. Considering how prejudiced he must have been he was certainly behaving very well; even at that distance Miss Birdseye dimly made out that there was something positively humble in the way he invited Verena Tarrant to seat herself on a low pile of weather-blackened planks, which constituted the principal furniture of the place, and something, perhaps, just a trifle too expressive of righteous triumph in the manner in which the girl put the suggestion by and stood where she liked, a little proudly, turning a good deal away from him. Miss Birdseye could see as much as this, but she couldn't hear, so that she didn't know what it was that made Verena turn suddenly back to him, at something he said. If she had known, perhaps his observation would have struck her as less singular—under the circumstances in which these two young persons met—than it may appear to the reader.

"They have accepted one of my articles; I think it's the best." These were the first words that passed Basil Ransom's lips after the pair had withdrawn as far as it was possible to withdraw (in that direction) from the house.

"Oh, is it printed—when does it appear?" Verena asked that question instantly; it sprang from her lips in a manner that completely belied the air of keeping herself at a distance from him which she had worn a few moments before.

He didn't tell her again this time, as he had told her when, on the occasion of their walk together in New York, she expressed an inconsequent hope that

his fortune as a rejected contributor would take a turn—he didn't remark to her once more that she was a delightful being; he only went on (as if her revulsion were a matter of course) to explain everything he could, so that she might as soon as possible know him better and see how completely she could trust him. "That was, at bottom, the reason I came here. The essay in question is the most important thing I have done in the way of a literary attempt, and I determined to give up the game or to persist, according as I should be able to bring it to the light or not. The other day I got a letter from the editor of the *Rational Review*, telling me that he should be very happy to print it, that he thought it very remarkable, and that he should be glad to hear from me again. He shall hear from me again—he needn't be afraid! It contained a good many of the opinions I have expressed to you, and a good many more besides. I really believe it will attract some attention. At any rate, the simple fact that it is to be published makes an era in my life. This will seem pitiful to you, no doubt, who publish yourself, have been before the world these several years, and are flushed with every kind of triumph; but to me it's simply a tremendous affair. It makes me believe I may do something; it has changed the whole way I look at my future. I have been building castles in the air, and I have put you in the biggest and fairest of them. That's a great change, and, as I say, it's really why I came on."

Verena lost not a word of this gentle, conciliatory, explicit statement; it was full of surprises for her, and as soon as Ransom had stopped speaking she inquired: "Why, didn't you feel satisfied about your future before?"

Her tone made him feel how little she had suspected he could have the weakness of a discourage-

ment, how little of a question it must have seemed to her that he would one day triumph on his own erratic line. It was the sweetest tribute he had yet received to the idea that he might have ability; the letter of the editor of the *Rational Review* was nothing to it. "No, I felt very blue; it didn't seem to me at all clear that there was a place for me in the world."

"Gracious!" said Verena Tarrant.

A quarter of an hour later Miss Birdseye, who had returned to her letters (she had a correspondent at Framingham who usually wrote fifteen pages), became aware that Verena, who was now alone, was re-entering the house. She stopped her on her way, and said she hoped she hadn't pushed Mr. Ransom overboard.

"Oh no; he has gone off—round the other way."

"Well, I hope he is going to speak for us soon."

Verena hesitated a moment. "He speaks with the pen. He has written a very fine article—for the *Rational Review*."

Miss Birdseye gazed at her young friend complacently; the sheets of her interminable letter fluttered in the breeze. "Well, it's delightful to see the way it goes on, isn't it?"

Verena scarcely knew what to say; then, remembering that Doctor Prance had told her that they might lose their dear old companion any day, and confronting it with something Basil Ransom had just said—that the *Rational Review* was a quarterly and the editor had notified him that his article would appear only in the number after the next—she reflected that perhaps Miss Birdseye wouldn't be there, so many months later, to see how it was her supposed consort had spoken. She might, therefore, be left to believe what she liked to believe, without fear of a day of reckoning. Verena committed her-

self to nothing more confirmatory than a kiss, however, which the old lady's displaced head-gear enabled her to imprint upon her forehead and which caused Miss Birdseye to exclaim, "Why, Verena Tarrant, how cold your lips are!" It was not surprising to Verena to hear that her lips were cold; a mortal chill had crept over her, for she knew that this time she should have a tremendous scene with Olive.

She found her in her room, to which she had fled on quitting Mr. Ransom's presence; she sat in the window, having evidently sunk into a chair the moment she came in, a position from which she must have seen Verena walk through the garden and down to the water with the intruder. She remained as she had collapsed, quite prostrate; her attitude was the same as that other time Verena had found her waiting, in New York. What Olive was likely to say to her first the girl scarcely knew; her mind, at any rate, was full of an intention of her own. She went straight to her and fell on her knees before her, taking hold of the hands which were clasped together, with nervous intensity, in Miss Chancellor's lap. Verena remained a moment, looking up at her, and then said:

"There is something I want to tell you now, without a moment's delay; something I didn't tell you at the time it happened, nor afterwards. Mr. Ransom came out to see me once, at Cambridge, a little while before we went to New York. He spent a couple of hours with me; we took a walk together and saw the colleges. It was after that that he wrote to me—when I answered his letter, as I told you in New York. I didn't tell you then of his visit. We had a great deal of talk about him, and I kept that back. I did so on purpose; I can't explain why, except that I didn't like to tell you, and that I thought it better. But now I want you to know

everything; when you know that, you *will* know everything. It was only one visit—about two hours. I enjoyed it very much—he seemed so much interested. One reason I didn't tell you was that I didn't want you to know that he had come on to Boston, and called on me in Cambridge, without going to see you. I thought it might affect you disagreeably. I suppose you will think I deceived you; certainly I left you with a wrong impression. But now I want you to know all—all!"

Verena spoke with breathless haste and eagerness; there was a kind of passion in the way she tried to expiate her former want of candour. Olive listened, staring; at first she seemed scarcely to understand. But Verena perceived that she understood sufficiently when she broke out: "You deceived me—you deceived me! Well, I must say I like your deceit better than such dreadful revelations! And what does anything matter when he has come after you now? What does he want—what has he come for?"

"He has come to ask me to be his wife."

Verena said this with the same eagerness, with as determined an air of not incurring any reproach this time. But as soon as she had spoken she buried her head in Olive's lap.

Olive made no attempt to raise it again, and returned none of the pressure of her hands; she only sat silent for a time, during which Verena wondered that the idea of the episode at Cambridge, laid bare only after so many months, should not have struck her more deeply. Presently she saw it was because the horror of what had just happened drew her off from it. At last Olive asked: "Is that what he told you, off there by the water?"

"Yes"—and Verena looked up—"he wanted me to know it right away. He says it's only fair to you that he should give notice of his intentions. He

wants to try and make me like him—so he says. He wants to see more of me, and he wants me to know him better."

Olive lay back in her chair, with dilated eyes and parted lips. "Verena Tarrant, what *is* there between you? what *can* I hold on to, what *can* I believe? Two hours, in Cambridge, before we went to New York?" The sense that Verena had been perfidious there—perfidious in her reticence—now began to roll over her. "Mercy of heaven, how you did act!"

"Olive, it was to spare you."

"To spare me? If you really wished to spare me he wouldn't be here now!"

Miss Chancellor flashed this out with a sudden violence, a spasm which threw Verena off and made her rise to her feet. For an instant the two young women stood confronted, and a person who had seen them at that moment might have taken them for enemies rather than friends. But any such opposition could last but a few seconds. Verena replied, with a tremor in her voice which was not that of passion, but of charity: "Do you mean that I expected him, that I brought him? I never in my life was more surprised at anything than when I saw him there."

"Hasn't he the delicacy of one of his own slave-drivers? Doesn't he know you loathe him?"

Verena looked at her friend with a degree of majesty which, with her, was rare. "I don't loathe him—I only dislike his opinions."

"Dislike! Oh, misery!" And Olive turned away to the open window, leaning her forehead against the lifted sash.

Verena hesitated, then went to her, passing her arm round her. "Don't scold me! help me—help me!" she murmured.

Olive gave her a sidelong look; then, catching

her up and facing her again—" Will you come away, now, by the next train ? "

" Flee from him again, as I did in New York ? No, no, Olive Chancellor, that's not the way," Verena went on, reasoningly, as if all the wisdom of the ages were seated on her lips. " Then how can we leave Miss Birdseye, in her state ? We must stay here—we must fight it out here."

" Why not be honest, if you have been false—really honest, not only half so ? Why not tell him plainly that you love him ? "

" Love him, Olive ? why, I scarcely know him."

" You'll have a chance, if he stays a month ! "

" I don't dislike him, certainly, as you do. But how can I love him when he tells me he wants me to give up everything, all our work, our faith, our future, never to give another address, to open my lips in public ? How can I consent to that ? " Verena went on, smiling strangely.

" He asks you that, just that way ? "

" No ; it's not that way. It's very kindly."

" Kindly ? Heaven help you, don't grovel ! Doesn't he know it's my house ? " Olive added, in a moment.

" Of course he won't come into it, if you forbid him."

" So that you may meet him in other places—on the shore, in the country ? "

" I certainly shan't avoid him, hide away from him," said Verena proudly. " I thought I made you believe, in New York, that I really cared for our aspirations. The way for me then is to meet him, feeling conscious of my strength. What if I do like him ? what does it matter ? I like my work in the world, I like everything I believe in, better."

Olive listened to this, and the memory of how, in the house in Tenth Street, Verena had rebuked

her doubts, professed her own faith anew, came back to her with a force which made the present situation appear slightly less terrific. Nevertheless, she gave no assent to the girl's logic; she only replied: "But you didn't meet him there; you hurried away from New York, after I was willing you should stay. He affected you very much there; you were not so calm when you came back to me from your expedition to the park as you pretend to be now. To get away from him you gave up all the rest."

"I know I wasn't so calm. But now I have had three months to think about it—about the way he affected me there. I take it very quietly."

"No, you don't; you are not calm now!"

Verena was silent a moment, while Olive's eyes continued to search her, accuse her, condemn her. "It's all the more reason you shouldn't give me stab after stab," she replied, with a gentleness which was infinitely touching.

It had an instant effect upon Olive; she burst into tears, threw herself on her friend's bosom. "Oh, don't desert me—don't desert me, or you'll kill me in torture," she moaned, shuddering.

"You must help me—you must help me!" cried Verena, imploringly too.

XXXVII

Basil Ransom spent nearly a month at Marmion; in announcing this fact I am very conscious of its extraordinary character. Poor Olive may well have been thrown back into her alarms by his presenting himself there; for after her return from New York she took to her soul the conviction that she had really done with him. Not only did the impulse of revulsion under which Verena had demanded that their departure from Tenth Street should be immediate appear to her a proof that it had been sufficient for her young friend to touch Mr. Ransom's moral texture with her finger, as it were, in order to draw back for ever; but what she had learned from her companion of his own manifestations, his apparent disposition to throw up the game, added to her feeling of security. He had spoken to Verena of their little excursion as his last opportunity, let her know that he regarded it not as the beginning of a more intimate acquaintance but as the end even of such relations as already existed between them. He gave her up, for reasons best known to himself; if he wanted to frighten Olive he judged that he had frightened her enough: his Southern chivalry suggested to him perhaps that he ought to let her off before he had worried her to death. Doubtless, too, he had perceived how vain it was to hope to make Verena abjure a faith so solidly founded; and though

he admired her enough to wish to possess her on his own terms, he shrank from the mortification which the future would have in keeping for him—that of finding that, after six months of courting and in spite of all her sympathy, her desire to do what people expected of her, she despised his opinions as much as the first day. Olive Chancellor was able to a certain extent to believe what she wished to believe, and that was one reason why she had twisted Verena's flight from New York, just after she let her friend see how much she should like to drink deeper of the cup, into a warrant for living in a fool's paradise. If she had been less afraid, she would have read things more clearly; she would have seen that we don't run away from people unless we fear them and that we don't fear them unless we know that we are unarmed. Verena feared Basil Ransom now (though this time she declined to run); but now she had taken up her weapons, she had told Olive she was exposed, she had asked *her* to be her defence. Poor Olive was stricken as she had never been before, but the extremity of her danger gave her a desperate energy. The only comfort in her situation was that this time Verena had confessed her peril, had thrown herself into her hands. "I like him—I can't help it—I do like him. I don't want to marry him, I don't want to embrace his ideas, which are unspeakably false and horrible; but I like him better than any gentleman I have seen." So much as this the girl announced to her friend as soon as the conversation of which I have just given a sketch was resumed, as it was very soon, you may be sure, and very often, in the course of the next few days. That was her way of saying that a great crisis had arrived in her life, and the statement needed very little amplification to stand as a shy avowal that she too had succumbed to the universal passion. Olive had had

her suspicions, her terrors, before; but she perceived now how idle and foolish they had been, and that this was a different affair from any of the "phases" of which she had hitherto anxiously watched the development. As I say, she felt it to be a considerable mercy that Verena's attitude was frank, for it gave her something to take hold of; she could no longer be put off with sophistries about receiving visits from handsome and unscrupulous young men for the sake of the opportunities it gave one to convert them. She took hold, accordingly, with passion, with fury; after the shock of Ransom's arrival had passed away she determined that he should not find her chilled into dumb submission. Verena had told her that she wanted her to hold her tight, to rescue her; and there was no fear that, for an instant, she should sleep at her post.

"I like him—I like him; but I want to hate——"

"You want to hate him!" Olive broke in.

"No, I want to hate my liking. I want you to keep before me all the reasons why I should—many of them so fearfully important. Don't let me lose sight of anything! Don't be afraid I shall not be grateful when you remind me."

That was one of the singular speeches that Verena made in the course of their constant discussion of the terrible question, and it must be confessed that she made a great many. The strangest of all was when she protested, as she did again and again to Olive, against the idea of their seeking safety in retreat. She said there was a want of dignity in it—that she had been ashamed, afterwards, of what she had done in rushing away from New York. This care for her moral appearance was, on Verena's part, something new; inasmuch as, though she had struck that note on previous occasions—had insisted on its being her duty to face the accidents and alarms of

life—she had never erected such a standard in the face of a disaster so sharply possible. It was not her habit either to talk or to think about her dignity, and when Olive found her taking that tone she felt more than ever that the dreadful, ominous, fatal part of the situation was simply that now, for the first time in all the history of their sacred friendship, Verena was not sincere. She was not sincere when she told her that she wanted to be helped against Mr. Ransom—when she exhorted her, that way, to keep everything that was salutary and fortifying before her eyes. Olive did not go so far as to believe that she was playing a part and putting her off with words which, glossing over her treachery, only made it more cruel; she would have admitted that that treachery was as yet unwitting, that Verena deceived herself first of all, thinking she really wished to be saved. Her phrases about her dignity were insincere, as well as her pretext that they must stay to look after Miss Birdseye: as if Doctor Prance were not abundantly able to discharge that function and would not be enchanted to get them out of the house! Olive had perfectly divined by this time that Doctor Prance had no sympathy with their movement, no general ideas; that she was simply shut up to petty questions of physiological science and of her own professional activity. She would never have invited her down if she had realised this in advance so much as the doctor's dry detachment from all their discussions, their readings and practisings, her constant expeditions to fish and botanise, subsequently enabled her to do. She was very narrow, but it did seem as if she knew more about Miss Birdseye's peculiar physical conditions—they were *very* peculiar—than any one else, and this was a comfort at a time when that admirable woman seemed to be suffering a loss of vitality.

"The great point is that it must be met some time, and it will be a tremendous relief to have it over. He is determined to have it out with me, and if the battle doesn't come off to-day we shall have to fight it to-morrow. I don't see why this isn't as good a time as any other. My lecture for the Music Hall is as good as finished, and I haven't got anything else to do; so I can give all my attention to our personal struggle. It requires a good deal, you would admit, if you knew how wonderfully he can talk. If we should leave this place to-morrow he would come after us to the very next one. He would follow us everywhere. A little while ago we could have escaped him, because he says that then he had no money. He hasn't got much now, but he has got enough to pay his way. He is so encouraged by the reception of his article by the editor of the *Rational Review*, that he is sure that in future his pen will be a resource."

These remarks were uttered by Verena after Basil Ransom had been three days at Marmion, and when she reached this point her companion interrupted her with the inquiry, "Is that what he proposes to support you with—his pen?"

"Oh yes; of course he admits we should be terribly poor."

"And this vision of a literary career is based entirely upon an article that hasn't yet seen the light? I don't see how a man of any refinement can approach a woman with so beggarly an account of his position in life."

"He says he wouldn't—he would have been ashamed—three months ago; that was why, when we were in New York, and he felt, even then—well (so he says) all he feels now, he made up his mind not to persist, to let me go. But just lately a change has taken place; his state of mind altered completely,

in the course of a week, in consequence of the letter that editor wrote him about his contribution, and his paying for it right off. It was a remarkably flattering letter. He says he believes in his future now; he has before him a vision of distinction, of influence, and of fortune, not great, perhaps, but sufficient to make life tolerable. He doesn't think life is very delightful, in the nature of things; but one of the best things a man can do with it is to get hold of some woman (of course, she must please him very much, to make it worth while) whom he may draw close to him."

"And couldn't he get hold of any one but you—among all the exposed millions of our sex?" poor Olive groaned. "Why must he pick you out, when everything he knew about you showed you to be, exactly, the very last?"

"That's just what I have asked him, and he only remarks that there is no reasoning about such things. He fell in love with me that first evening, at Miss Birdseye's. So you see there was some ground for that mystic apprehension of yours. It seems as if I pleased him more than any one."

Olive flung herself over on the couch, burying her face in the cushions, which she tumbled in her despair, and moaning out that he didn't love Verena, he never had loved her, it was only his hatred of their cause that made him pretend it; he wanted to do that an injury, to do it the worst he could think of. He didn't love her, he hated her, he only wanted to smother her, to crush her, to kill her—as she would infallibly see that he would if she listened to him. It was because he knew that her voice had magic in it, and from the moment he caught its first note he had determined to destroy it. It was not tenderness that moved him—it was devilish malignity; tenderness would be incapable of requiring the horrible

sacrifice that he was not ashamed to ask, of requiring her to commit perjury and blasphemy, to desert a work, an interest, with which her very heart-strings were interlaced, to give the lie to her whole young past, to her purest, holiest ambitions. Olive put forward no claim of her own, breathed, at first, at least, not a word of remonstrance in the name of her personal loss, of their blighted union ; she only dwelt upon the unspeakable tragedy of a defection from their standard, of a failure on Verena's part to carry out what she had undertaken, of the horror of seeing her bright career blotted out with darkness and tears, of the joy and elation that would fill the breast of all their adversaries at this illustrious, consummate proof of the fickleness, the futility, the predestined servility, of women. A man had only to whistle for her, and she who had pretended most was delighted to come and kneel at his feet. Olive's most passionate protest was summed up in her saying that if Verena were to forsake them it would put back the emancipation of women a hundred years. She did not, during these dreadful days, talk continuously ; she had long periods of pale, intensely anxious, watchful silence, interrupted by outbreaks of passionate argument, entreaty, invocation. It was Verena who talked incessantly, Verena who was in a state entirely new to her, and, as any one could see, in an attitude entirely unnatural and overdone. If she was deceiving herself, as Olive said, there was something very affecting in her effort, her ingenuity. If she tried to appear to Olive impartial, coldly judicious, in her attitude with regard to Basil Ransom, and only anxious to see, for the moral satisfaction of the thing, how good a case, as a lover, he might make out for himself and how much he might touch her susceptibilities, she endeavoured, still more earnestly, to practise this fraud upon her own imagination. She abounded in every proof that

she should be in despair if she should be overborne, and she thought of arguments even more convincing, if possible, than Olive's, why she should hold on to her old faith, why she should resist even at the cost of acute temporary suffering. She was voluble, fluent, feverish; she was perpetually bringing up the subject, as if to encourage her friend, to show how she kept possession of her judgement, how independent she remained.

No stranger situation can be imagined than that of these extraordinary young women at this juncture; it was so singular on Verena's part, in particular, that I despair of presenting it to the reader with the air of reality. To understand it, one must bear in mind her peculiar frankness, natural and acquired, her habit of discussing questions, sentiments, moralities, her education, in the atmosphere of lecture-rooms, of *séances*, her familiarity with the vocabulary of emotion, the mysteries of "the spiritual life." She had learned to breathe and move in a rarefied air, as she would have learned to speak Chinese if her success in life had depended upon it; but this dazzling trick, and all her artlessly artful facilities, were not a part of her essence, an expression of her innermost preferences. What *was* a part of her essence was the extraordinary generosity with which she could expose herself, give herself away, turn herself inside out, for the satisfaction of a person who made demands of her. Olive, as we know, had made the reflexion that no one was naturally less preoccupied with the idea of her dignity, and though Verena put it forward as an excuse for remaining where they were, it must be admitted that in reality she was very deficient in the desire to be consistent with herself. Olive had contributed with all her zeal to the development of Verena's gift; but I scarcely venture to think now, what she may have said to herself, in the secrecy of deep meditation,

about the consequences of cultivating an abundant eloquence. Did she say that Verena was attempting to smother her now in her own phrases? did she view with dismay the fatal effect of trying to have an answer for everything? From Olive's condition during these lamentable weeks there is a certain propriety—a delicacy enjoined by the respect for misfortune—in averting our head. She neither ate nor slept; she could scarcely speak without bursting into tears; she felt so implacably, insidiously baffled. She remembered the magnanimity with which she had declined (the winter before the last) to receive the vow of eternal maidenhood which she had at first demanded and then put by as too crude a test, but which Verena, for a precious hour, for ever flown, would *then* have been willing to take. She repented of it with bitterness and rage; and then she asked herself, more desperately still, whether even if she held that pledge she should be brave enough to enforce it in the face of actual complications. She believed that if it were in her power to say, "No, I won't let you off; I have your solemn word, and I won't!" Verena would bow to that decree and remain with her; but the magic would have passed out of her spirit for ever, the sweetness out of their friendship, the efficacy out of their work. She said to her again and again that she had utterly changed since that hour she came to her, in New York, after her morning with Mr. Ransom, and sobbed out that they must hurry away. Then she had been wounded, outraged, sickened, and in the interval nothing had happened, nothing but that one exchange of letters, which she knew about, to bring her round to a shameless tolerance. Shameless Verena admitted it to be; she assented over and over to this proposition, and explained, as eagerly each time as if it were the first, what it was that had come to pass, what it was that

had brought her round. It had simply come over her that she liked him, that this was the true point of view, the only one from which one could consider the situation in a way that would lead to what she called a *real* solution—a permanent rest. On this particular point Verena never responded, in the liberal way I have mentioned, without asseverating at the same time that what she desired most in the world was to prove (the picture Olive had held up from the first) that a woman *could* live on persistently, clinging to a great, vivifying, redemptory idea, without the help of a man. To testify to the end against the stale superstition—mother of every misery—that those gentry were as indispensable as they had proclaimed themselves on the house-tops—that, she passionately protested, was as inspiring a thought in the present poignant crisis as it had ever been.

The one grain of comfort that Olive extracted from the terrors that pressed upon her was that now she knew the worst; she knew it since Verena had told her, after so long and so ominous a reticence, of the detestable episode at Cambridge. That seemed to her the worst, because it had been thunder in a clear sky; the incident had sprung from a quarter from which, months before, all symptoms appeared to have vanished. Though Verena had now done all she could to make up for her perfidious silence by repeating everything that passed between them as she sat with Mr. Ransom in Monadnoc Place or strolled with him through the colleges, it imposed itself upon Olive that that occasion was the key of all that had happened since, that he had then obtained an irremediable hold upon her. If Verena had spoken at the time, she would never have let her go to New York; the sole compensation for that hideous mistake was that the girl, recognising it to the full, evidently deemed now that she couldn't be communicative

enough. There were certain afternoons in August, long, beautiful and terrible, when one felt that the summer was rounding its curve, and the rustle of the full-leaved trees in the slanting golden light, in the breeze that ought to be delicious, seemed the voice of the coming autumn, of the warnings and dangers of life—portentous, insufferable hours when, as she sat under the softly swaying vine-leaves of the trellis with Miss Birdseye and tried, in order to still her nerves, to read something aloud to her guest, the sound of her own quavering voice made her think more of that baleful day at Cambridge than even of the fact that at that very moment Verena was "off" with Mr. Ransom—had gone to take the little daily walk with him to which it had been arranged that their enjoyment of each other's society should be reduced. Arranged, I say; but that is not exactly the word to describe the compromise arrived at by a kind of tacit exchange of tearful entreaty and tightened grasp, after Ransom had made it definite to Verena that he was indeed going to stay a month and she had promised that she would not resort to base evasions, to flight (which would avail her nothing, he notified her), but would give him a chance, would listen to him a few minutes every day. He had insisted that the few minutes should be an hour, and the way to spend it was obvious. They wandered along the waterside to a rocky, shrub-covered point, which made a walk of just the right duration. Here all the homely languor of the region, the mild, fragrant Cape-quality, the sweetness of white sands, quiet waters, low promontories where there were paths among the barberries and tidal pools gleamed in the sunset—here all the spirit of a ripe summer afternoon seemed to hang in the air. There were wood-walks too; they sometimes followed bosky uplands, where accident had grouped the trees with odd effects of

" style," and where in grassy intervals and fragrant nooks of rest they came out upon sudden patches of Arcady. In such places Verena listened to her companion with her watch in her hand, and she wondered, very sincerely, how he could care for a girl who made the conditions of courtship so odious. He had recognised, of course, at the very first, that he could not inflict himself again upon Miss Chancellor, and after that awkward morning-call I have described he did not again, for the first three weeks of his stay at Marmion, penetrate into the cottage whose back windows overlooked the deserted shipyard. Olive, as may be imagined, made, on this occasion, no protest for the sake of being ladylike or of preventing him from putting her apparently in the wrong. The situation between them was too grim ; it was war to the knife, it was a question of which should pull hardest. So Verena took a tryst with the young man as if she had been a maid-servant and Basil Ransom a " follower." They met a little way from the house ; beyond it, outside the village.

XXXVIII

Olive thought she knew the worst, as we have perceived ; but the worst was really something she could not know, inasmuch as up to this time Verena chose as little to confide to her on that one point as she was careful to expatiate with her on every other. The change that had taken place in the object of Basil Ransom's merciless devotion since the episode in New York was, briefly, just this change—that the words he had spoken to her there about her genuine vocation, as distinguished from the hollow and factitious ideal with which her family and her association with Olive Chancellor had saddled her—these words, the most effective and penetrating he had uttered, had sunk into her soul and worked and fermented there. She had come at last to believe them, and that was the alteration, the transformation. They had kindled a light in which she saw herself afresh and, strange to say, liked herself better than in the old exaggerated glamour of the lecture-lamps. She could not tell Olive this yet, for it struck at the root of everything, and the dreadful, delightful sensation filled her with a kind of awe at all that it implied and portended. She was to burn everything she had adored ; she was to adore everything she had burned. The extraordinary part of it was that though she felt the situation to be, as I say, tremendously serious, she was not ashamed of the treachery

which she—yes, decidedly, by this time she must admit it to herself—she meditated. It was simply that the truth had changed sides; that radiant image began to look at her from Basil Ransom's expressive eyes. She loved, she was in love—she felt it in every throb of her being. Instead of being constituted by nature for entertaining that sentiment in an exceptionally small degree (which had been the implication of her whole crusade, the warrant for her offer of old to Olive to renounce), she was framed, apparently, to allow it the largest range, the highest intensity. It was always passion, in fact; but now the object was other. Formerly she had been convinced that the fire of her spirit was a kind of double flame, one half of which was responsive friendship for a most extraordinary person, and the other pity for the sufferings of women in general. Verena gazed aghast at the colourless dust into which, in three short months (counting from the episode in New York), such a conviction as that could crumble; she felt it must be a magical touch that could bring about such a cataclysm. Why Basil Ransom had been deputed by fate to exercise this spell was more than she could say—poor Verena, who up to so lately had flattered herself that she had a wizard's wand in her own pocket.

When she saw him a little way off, about five o'clock—the hour she usually went out to meet him—waiting for her at a bend of the road which lost itself, after a winding, straggling mile or two, in the indented, insulated "point," where the wandering bee droned through the hot hours with a vague, misguided flight, she felt that his tall, watching figure, with the low horizon behind, represented well the importance, the towering eminence he had in her mind—the fact that he was just now, to her vision, the most definite and upright, the most incomparable,

object in the world. If he had not been at his post when she expected him she would have had to stop and lean against something, for weakness; her whole being would have throbbed more painfully than it throbbed at present, though finding him there made her nervous enough. And who was he, what was he? she asked herself. What did he offer her besides a chance (in which there was no compensation of brilliancy or fashion) to falsify, in a conspicuous manner, every hope and pledge she had hitherto given? He allowed her, certainly, no illusion on the subject of the fate she should meet as his wife; he flung over it no rosiness of promised ease; he let her know that she should be poor, withdrawn from view, a partner of his struggle, of his severe, hard, unique stoicism. When he spoke of such things as these, and bent his eyes on her, she could not keep the tears from her own; she felt that to throw herself into his life (bare and arid as for the time it was) was the condition of happiness for her, and yet that the obstacles were terrible, cruel. It must not be thought that the revolution which was taking place in her was unaccompanied with suffering. She suffered less than Olive certainly, for her bent was not, like her friend's, in that direction; but as the wheel of her experience went round she had the sensation of being ground very small indeed. With her light, bright texture, her complacent responsiveness, her genial, graceful, ornamental cast, her desire to keep on pleasing others at the time when a force she had never felt before was pushing her to please herself, poor Verena lived in these days in a state of moral tension—with a sense of being strained and aching—which she didn't betray more only because it was absolutely not in her power to look desperate. An immense pity for Olive sat in her heart, and she asked herself how far it was necessary to go in the

path of self-sacrifice. Nothing was wanting to make the wrong she should do her complete; she had deceived her up to the very last; only three months earlier she had reasserted her vows, given her word, with every show of fidelity and enthusiasm. There were hours when it seemed to Verena that she must really push her inquiry no further, but content herself with the conclusion that she loved as deeply as a woman could love and that it didn't make any difference. She felt Olive's grasp too clinching, too terrible. She said to herself that she should never dare, that she might as well give up early as late; that the scene, at the end, would be something she couldn't face; that she had no right to blast the poor creature's whole future. She had a vision of those dreadful years; she knew that Olive would never get over the disappointment. It would touch her in the point where she felt everything most keenly; she would be incurably lonely and eternally humiliated. It was a very peculiar thing, their friendship; it had elements which made it probably as complete as any (between women) that had ever existed. Of course it had been more on Olive's side than on hers, she had always known that; but that, again, didn't make any difference. It was of no use for her to tell herself that Olive had begun it entirely and she had only responded out of a kind of charmed politeness, at first, to a tremendous appeal. She had lent herself, given herself, utterly, and she ought to have known better if she didn't mean to abide by it. At the end of three weeks she felt that her inquiry was complete, but that after all nothing was gained except an immense interest in Basil Ransom's views and the prospect of an eternal heartache. He had told her he wanted her to know him, and now she knew him pretty thoroughly. She knew him and she adored him, but it didn't make any difference. To give him

up or to give Olive up—this effort would be the greater of the two.

If Basil Ransom had the advantage, as far back as that day in New York, of having struck a note which was to reverberate, it may easily be imagined that he did not fail to follow it up. If he had projected a new light into Verena's mind, and made the idea of giving herself to a man more agreeable to her than that of giving herself to a movement, he found means to deepen this illumination, to drag her former standard in the dust. He was in a very odd situation indeed, carrying on his siege with his hands tied. As he had to do everything in an hour a day, he perceived that he must confine himself to the essential. The essential was to show her how much he loved her, and then to press, to press, always to press. His hovering about Miss Chancellor's habitation without going in was a strange regimen to be subjected to, and he was sorry not to see more of Miss Birdseye, besides often not knowing what to do with himself in the mornings and evenings. Fortunately he had brought plenty of books (volumes of rusty aspect, picked up at New York bookstalls), and in such an affair as this he could take the less when the more was forbidden him. For the mornings, sometimes, he had the resource of Doctor Prance, with whom he made a great many excursions on the water. She was devoted to boating and an ardent fisherwoman, and they used to pull out into the bay together, cast their lines, and talk a prodigious amount of heresy. She met him, as Verena met him, "in the environs," but in a different spirit. He was immensely amused at her attitude, and saw that nothing in the world could, as he expressed it, make her wink. She would never blench nor show surprise; she had an air of taking everything abnormal for granted; betrayed no consciousness of the oddity

of Ransom's situation ; said nothing to indicate she had noticed that Miss Chancellor was in a frenzy or that Verena had a daily appointment. You might have supposed from her manner that it was as natural for Ransom to sit on a fence half a mile off as in one of the red rocking-chairs, of the so-called " Shaker " species, which adorned Miss Chancellor's back verandah. The only thing our young man didn't like about Doctor Prance was the impression she gave him (out of the crevices of her reticence he hardly knew how it leaked) that she thought Verena rather slim. She took an ironical view of almost any kind of courtship, and he could see she didn't wonder women were such featherheads, so long as, whatever brittle follies they cultivated, they could get men to come and sit on fences for them. Doctor Prance told him Miss Birdseye noticed nothing ; she had sunk, within a few days, into a kind of transfigured torpor ; she didn't seem to know whether Mr. Ransom were anywhere round or not. She guessed she thought he had just come down for a day and gone off again ; she probably supposed he just wanted to get toned up a little by Miss Tarrant. Sometimes, out in the boat, when she looked at him in vague, sociable silence, while she waited for a bite (she delighted in a bite), she had an expression of diabolical shrewdness. When Ransom was not scorching there beside her (he didn't mind the sun of Massachusetts), he lounged about in the pastoral land which hung (at a very moderate elevation) above the shore. He always had a book in his pocket, and he lay under whispering trees and kicked his heels and made up his mind on what side he should take Verena the next time. At the end of a fortnight he had succeeded (so he believed, at least) far better than he had hoped, in this sense, that the girl had now the air of making much more light of her " gift." He was indeed quite appalled

at the facility with which she threw it over, gave up the idea that it was useful and precious. That had been what he wanted her to do, and the fact of the sacrifice (once she had fairly looked at it) costing her so little only proved his contention, only made it clear that it was not necessary to her happiness to spend half her life ranting (no matter how prettily) in public. All the same he said to himself that, to make up for the loss of whatever was sweet in the reputation of the thing, he should have to be tremendously nice to her in all the coming years. During the first week he was at Marmion she made of him an inquiry which touched on this point.

"Well, if it's all a mere delusion, why should this facility have been given me—why should I have been saddled with a superfluous talent? I don't care much about it—I don't mind telling you that; but I confess I should like to know what is to become of all that part of me, if I retire into private life, and live, as you say, simply to be charming for you. I shall be like a singer with a beautiful voice (you have told me yourself my voice is beautiful) who has accepted some decree of never raising a note. Isn't that a great waste, a great violation of nature? Were not our talents given us to use, and have we any right to smother them and deprive our fellow-creatures of such pleasure as they may confer? In the arrangement you propose" (that was Verena's way of speaking of the question of their marriage) "I don't see what provision is made for the poor faithful, dismissed servant. It is all very well to be charming to you, but there are people who have told me that once I get on a platform I am charming to all the world. There is no harm in my speaking of that, because you have told me so yourself. Perhaps you intend to have a platform erected in our front parlour, where I can address you every evening,

and put you to sleep after your work. I say our *front* parlour, as if it were certain we should have two! It doesn't look as if our means would permit that—and we must have some place to dine, if there is to be a platform in our sitting-room."

"My dear young woman, it will be easy to solve the difficulty: the dining-table itself shall be our platform, and you shall mount on top of that." This was Basil Ransom's sportive reply to his companion's very natural appeal for light, and the reader will remark that if it led her to push her investigation no further, she was very easily satisfied. There was more reason, however, as well as more appreciation of a very considerable mystery, in what he went on to say. "Charming to me, charming to all the world? What will become of your charm?—is that what you want to know? It will be about five thousand times greater than it is now; that's what will become of it. We shall find plenty of room for your facility; it will lubricate our whole existence. Believe me, Miss Tarrant, these things will take care of themselves. You won't sing in the Music Hall, but you will sing to me; you will sing to every one who knows you and approaches you. Your gift is indestructible; don't talk as if I either wanted to wipe it out or should be able to make it a particle less divine. I want to give it another direction, certainly; but I don't want to stop your activity. Your gift is the gift of expression, and there is nothing I can do for you that will make you less expressive. It won't gush out at a fixed hour and on a fixed day, but it will irrigate, it will fertilise, it will brilliantly adorn your conversation. Think how delightful it will be when your influence becomes really social. Your facility, as you call it, will simply make you, in conversation, the most charming woman in America."

It is to be feared, indeed, that Verena was easily satisfied (convinced, I mean, not that she ought to succumb to him, but that there were lovely, neglected, almost unsuspected truths on his side); and there is further evidence on the same head in the fact that after the first once or twice she found nothing to say to him (much as she was always saying to herself) about the cruel effect her apostasy would have upon Olive. She forbore to plead that reason after she had seen how angry it made him, and with how almost savage a contempt he denounced so flimsy a pretext. He wanted to know since when it was more becoming to take up with a morbid old maid than with an honourable young man; and when Verena pronounced the sacred name of friendship he inquired what fanatical sophistry excluded him from a similar privilege. She had told him, in a moment of expansion (Verena believed she was immensely on her guard, but her guard was very apt to be lowered), that his visits to Marmion cast in Olive's view a remarkable light upon his chivalry; she chose to regard his resolute pursuit of Verena as a covert persecution of herself. Verena repented, as soon as she had spoken, of having given further currency to this taunt; but she perceived the next moment no harm was done, Basil Ransom taking in perfectly good part Miss Chancellor's reflexions on his delicacy, and making them the subject of much free laughter. She could not know, for in the midst of his hilarity the young man did not compose himself to tell her, that he had made up his mind on this question before he left New York—as long ago as when he wrote her the note (subsequent to her departure from that city) to which allusion has already been made, and which was simply the fellow of the letter addressed to her after his visit to Cambridge: a friendly, respectful, yet rather pregnant sign that, decidedly,

on second thoughts, separation didn't imply for him the intention of silence. We know a little about his second thoughts, as much as is essential, and especially how the occasion of their springing up had been the windfall of an editor's encouragement. The importance of that encouragement, to Basil's imagination, was doubtless much augmented by his desire for an excuse to take up again a line of behaviour which he had forsworn (small as had, as yet, been his opportunity to indulge in it) very much less than he supposed; still, it worked an appreciable revolution in his view of his case, and made him ask himself what amount of consideration he should (from the most refined Southern point of view) owe Miss Chancellor in the event of his deciding to go after Verena Tarrant in earnest. He was not slow to decide that he owed her none. Chivalry had to do with one's relations with people one hated, not with those one loved. He didn't hate poor Miss Olive, though she might make him yet; and even if he did, any chivalry was all moonshine which should require him to give up the girl he adored in order that his third cousin should see he could be gallant. Chivalry was forbearance and generosity with regard to the weak; and there was nothing weak about Miss Olive, she was a fighting woman, and she would fight him to the death, giving him not an inch of odds. He felt that she was fighting there all day long, in her cottage fortress; her resistance was in the air he breathed, and Verena came out to him sometimes quite limp and pale from the tussle.

It was in the same jocose spirit with which he regarded Olive's view of the sort of standard a Mississippian should live up to that he talked to Verena about the lecture she was preparing for her great exhibition at the Music Hall. He learned from her that she was to take the field in the manner of

Mrs. Farrinder, for a winter campaign, carrying with her a tremendous big gun. Her engagements were all made, her route was marked out; she expected to repeat her lecture in about fifty different places. It was to be called "A Woman's Reason," and both Olive and Miss Birdseye thought it, so far as they could tell in advance, her most promising effort. She wasn't going to trust to inspiration this time; she didn't want to meet a big Boston audience without knowing where she was. Inspiration, moreover, seemed rather to have faded away; in consequence of Olive's influence she had read and studied so much that it seemed now as if everything must take form beforehand. Olive was a splendid critic, whether he liked her or not, and she had made her go over every word of her lecture twenty times. There wasn't an intonation she hadn't made her practise; it was very different from the old system, when her father had worked her up. If Basil considered women superficial, it was a pity he couldn't see what Olive's standard of preparation was, or be present at their rehearsals, in the evening, in their little parlour. Ransom's state of mind in regard to the affair at the Music Hall was simply this—that he was determined to circumvent it if he could. He covered it with ridicule, in talking of it to Verena, and the shafts he levelled at it went so far that he could see she thought he exaggerated his dislike to it. In point of fact he could not have overstated that; so odious did the idea seem to him that she was soon to be launched in a more infatuated career. He vowed to himself that she should never take that fresh start which would commit her irretrievably if she should succeed (and she would succeed—he had not the slightest doubt of her power to produce a sensation in the Music Hall), to the acclamations of the newspapers. He didn't care for her engagements,

her campaigns, or all the expectancy of her friends; to "squelch" all that, at a stroke, was the dearest wish of his heart. It would represent to him his own success, it would symbolise his victory. It became a fixed idea with him, and he warned her again and again. When she laughed and said she didn't see how he could stop her unless he kidnapped her, he really pitied her for not perceiving, beneath his ominous pleasantries, the firmness of his resolution. He felt almost capable of kidnapping her. It was palpably in the air that she would become "widely popular," and that idea simply sickened him. He felt as differently as possible about it from Mr. Matthias Pardon.

One afternoon, as he returned with Verena from a walk which had been accomplished completely within the prescribed conditions, he saw, from a distance, Doctor Prance, who had emerged bareheaded from the cottage, and, shading her eyes from the red, declining sun, was looking up and down the road. It was part of the regulation that Ransom should separate from Verena before reaching the house, and they had just paused to exchange their last words (which every day promoted the situation more than any others), when Doctor Prance began to beckon to them with much animation. They hurried forward, Verena pressing her hand to her heart, for she had instantly guessed that something terrible had happened to Olive—she had given out, fainted away, perhaps fallen dead, with the cruelty of the strain. Doctor Prance watched them come, with a curious look in her face; it was not a smile, but a kind of exaggerated intimation that she noticed nothing. In an instant she had told them what was the matter. Miss Birdseye had had a sudden weakness; she had remarked abruptly that she was dying, and her pulse, sure enough, had fallen to nothing.

She was down on the piazza with Miss Chancellor and herself, and they had tried to get her up to bed. But she wouldn't let them move her ; she was passing away, and she wanted to pass away just there, in such a pleasant place, in her customary chair, looking at the sunset. She asked for Miss Tarrant, and Miss Chancellor told her she was out—walking with Mr. Ransom. Then she wanted to know if Mr. Ransom was still there—she supposed he had gone. (Basil knew, by Verena, apart from this, that his name had not been mentioned to the old lady since the morning he saw her.) She expressed a wish to see him—she had something to say to him ; and Miss Chancellor told her that he would be back soon, with Verena, and that they would bring him in. Miss Birdseye said she hoped they wouldn't be long, because she was sinking ; and Doctor Prance now added, like a person who knew what she was talking about, that it was, in fact, the end. She had darted out two or three times to look for them, and they must step right in. Verena had scarcely given her time to tell her story ; she had already rushed into the house. Ransom followed with Doctor Prance, conscious that for him the occasion was doubly solemn ; inasmuch as if he was to see poor Miss Birdseye yield up her philanthropic soul, he was on the other hand doubtless to receive from Miss Chancellor a reminder that *she* had no intention of quitting the game.

By the time he had made this reflexion he stood in the presence of his kinswoman and her venerable guest, who was sitting just as he had seen her before, muffled and bonneted, on the back piazza of the cottage. Olive Chancellor was on one side of her, holding one of her hands, and on the other was Verena, who had dropped on her knees, close to her, bending over those of the old lady. " Did you ask for me

—did you want me?" the girl said tenderly. "I will never leave you again."

"Oh, I won't keep you long. I only wanted to see you once more." Miss Birdseye's voice was very low, like that of a person breathing with difficulty; but it had no painful nor querulous note—it expressed only the cheerful weariness which had marked all this last period of her life, and which seemed to make it now as blissful as it was suitable that she should pass away. Her head was thrown back against the top of the chair, the ribbon which confined her ancient hat hung loose, and the late afternoon light covered her octogenarian face and gave it a kind of fairness, a double placidity. There was, to Ransom, something almost august in the trustful renunciation of her countenance; something in it seemed to say that she had been ready long before, but as the time was not ripe she had waited, with her usual faith that all was for the best; only, at present, since the right conditions met, she couldn't help feeling that it was quite a luxury, the greatest she had ever tasted. Ransom knew why it was that Verena had tears in her eyes as she looked up at her patient old friend; she had spoken to him, often, during the last three weeks, of the stories Miss Birdseye had told her of the great work of her life, her mission, repeated year after year, among the Southern blacks. She had gone among them with every precaution, to teach them to read and write; she had carried them Bibles and told them of the friends they had in the North who prayed for their deliverance. Ransom knew that Verena didn't reproduce these legends with a view to making him ashamed of his Southern origin, his connexion with people who, in a past not yet remote, had made that kind of apostleship necessary; he knew this because she had heard what he thought of all that chapter himself; he had given

her a kind of historical summary of the slavery question which left her no room to say that he was more tender to that particular example of human imbecility than he was to any other. But she had told him that this was what *she* would have liked to do—to wander, alone, with her life in her hand, on an errand of mercy, through a country in which society was arrayed against her; she would have liked it much better than simply talking about the right from the gas-lighted vantage of the New England platform. Ransom had replied simply "Balderdash!" it being his theory, as we have perceived, that he knew much more about Verena's native bent than the young lady herself. This did not, however, as he was perfectly aware, prevent her feeling that she had come too late for the heroic age of New England life, and regarding Miss Birdseye as a battered, immemorial monument of it. Ransom could share such an admiration as that, especially at this moment; he had said to Verena, more than once, that he wished he might have met the old lady in Carolina or Georgia before the war—shown her round among the negroes and talked over New England ideas with her; there were a good many he didn't care much about now, but at that time they would have been tremendously refreshing. Miss Birdseye had given herself away so lavishly all her life that it was rather odd there was anything left of her for the supreme surrender. When he looked at Olive he saw that she meant to ignore him; and during the few minutes he remained on the spot his kinswoman never met his eye. She turned away, indeed, as soon as Doctor Prance said, leaning over Miss Birdseye, "I have brought Mr. Ransom to you. Don't you remember you asked for him?"

"I am very glad to see you again," Ransom remarked. "It was very good of you to think of

me." At the sound of his voice Olive rose and left her place; she sank into a chair at the other end of the piazza, turning round to rest her arms on the back and bury her head in them.

Miss Birdseye looked at the young man still more dimly than she had ever done before. "I thought you were gone. You never came back."

"He spends all his time in long walks; he enjoys the country so much," Verena said.

"Well, it's very beautiful, what I see from here. I haven't been strong enough to move round since the first days. But I am going to move now." She smiled when Ransom made a gesture as if to help her, and added: "Oh, I don't mean I am going to move out of my chair."

"Mr. Ransom has been out in a boat with me several times. I have been showing him how to cast a line," said Doctor Prance, who appeared to deprecate a sentimental tendency.

"Oh, well, then, you have been one of our party; there seems to be every reason why you should feel that you belong to us." Miss Birdseye looked at the visitor with a sort of misty earnestness, as if she wished to communicate with him further; then her glance turned slightly aside; she tried to see what had become of Olive. She perceived that Miss Chancellor had withdrawn herself, and, closing her eyes, she mused, ineffectually, on the mystery she had not grasped, the peculiarity of Basil Ransom's relations with her hostess. She was visibly too weak to concern herself with it very actively; she only felt, now that she seemed really to be going, a desire to reconcile and harmonise. But she presently exhaled a low, soft sigh—a kind of confession that it was too mixed, that she gave it up. Ransom had feared for a moment that she was about to indulge in some appeal to Olive, some attempt to make him

join hands with that young lady, as a supreme satisfaction to herself. But he saw that her strength failed her, and that, besides, things were getting less clear to her; to his considerable relief, inasmuch as, though he would not have objected to joining hands, the expression of Miss Chancellor's figure and her averted face, with their desperate collapse, showed him well enough how *she* would have met such a proposal. What Miss Birdseye clung to, with benignant perversity, was the idea that, in spite of his exclusion from the house, which was perhaps only the result of a certain high-strung jealousy on Olive's part of her friend's other personal ties, Verena had drawn him in, had made him sympathise with the great reform and desire to work for it. Ransom saw no reason why such an illusion should be dear to Miss Birdseye; his contact with her in the past had been so momentary that he could not account for her taking an interest in his views, in his throwing his weight into the right scale. It was part of the general desire for justice that fermented within her, the passion for progress; and it was also in some degree her interest in Verena—a suspicion, innocent and idyllic, as any such suspicion on Miss Birdseye's part must be, that there was something between them, that the closest of all unions (as Miss Birdseye at least supposed it was) was preparing itself. Then his being a Southerner gave a point to the whole thing; to bring round a Southerner would be a real encouragement for one who had seen, even at a time when she was already an old woman, what was the tone of opinion in the cotton States. Ransom had no wish to discourage her, and he bore well in mind the caution Doctor Prance had given him about destroying her last theory. He only bowed his head very humbly, not knowing what he had done to earn the honour of being the subject of it. His eyes met

Verena's as she looked up at him from her place at Miss Birdseye's feet, and he saw she was following his thought, throwing herself into it, and trying to communicate to him a wish. The wish touched him immensely; she was dreadfully afraid he would betray her to Miss Birdseye—let her know how she had cooled off. Verena was ashamed of that now, and trembled at the danger of exposure; her eyes adjured him to be careful of what he said. Her tremor made him glow a little in return, for it seemed to him the fullest confession of his influence she had yet made.

"We have been a very happy little party," she said to the old lady. "It is delightful that you should have been able to be with us all these weeks."

"It has been a great rest. I am very tired. I can't speak much. It has been a lovely time. I have done so much—so many things."

"I guess I wouldn't talk much, Miss Birdseye," said Doctor Prance, who had now knelt down on the other side of her. "We know how much you have done. Don't you suppose every one knows *your* life?"

"It isn't much—only I tried to take hold. When I look back from here, from where we've sat, I can measure the progress. That's what I wanted to say to you and Mr. Ransom—because I'm going fast. Hold on to me, that's right; but you can't keep me. I don't want to stay now; I presume I shall join some of the others that we lost long ago. Their faces come back to me now, quite fresh. It seems as if they might be waiting; as if they were all there; as if they wanted to hear. You mustn't think there's no progress because you don't see it all right off; that's what I wanted to say. It isn't till you have gone a long way that you can feel what's been done. That's what I see when I look back from here; I

see that the community wasn't half waked up when I was young."

"It is you that have waked it up more than any one else, and it's for that we honour you, Miss Birdseye!" Verena cried, with a sudden violence of emotion. "If you were to live for a thousand years, you would think only of others—you would think only of helping on humanity. You are our heroine, you are our saint, and there has never been any one like you!" Verena had no glance for Ransom now, and there was neither deprecation nor entreaty in her face. A wave of contrition, of shame, had swept over her—a quick desire to atone for her secret swerving by a renewed recognition of the nobleness of such a life as Miss Birdseye's.

"Oh, I haven't effected very much; I have only cared and hoped. You will do more than I have ever done—you and Olive Chancellor, because you are young and bright, brighter than I ever was; and besides, everything has got started."

"Well, you've got started, Miss Birdseye," Doctor Prance remarked, with raised eyebrows, protesting dryly but kindly, and putting forward, with an air as if, after all, it didn't matter much, an authority that had been superseded. The manner in which this competent little woman indulged her patient showed sufficiently that the good lady was sinking fast.

"We will think of you always, and your name will be sacred to us, and that will teach us singleness and devotion," Verena went on, in the same tone, still not meeting Ransom's eyes again, and speaking as if she were trying now to stop herself, to tie herself by a vow.

"Well, it's the thing you and Olive have given your lives to that has absorbed me most, of late years. I did want to see justice done—to us. I

haven't seen it, but you will. And Olive will. Where is she—why isn't she near me, to bid me farewell? And Mr. Ransom will—and he will be proud to have helped."

"Oh, mercy, mercy!" cried Verena, burying her head in Miss Birdseye's lap.

"You are not mistaken if you think I desire above all things that your weakness, your generosity, should be protected," Ransom said, rather ambiguously, but with pointed respectfulness. "I shall remember you as an example of what women are capable of," he added; and he had no subsequent compunctions for the speech, for he thought poor Miss Birdseye, for all her absence of profile, essentially feminine.

A kind of frantic moan from Olive Chancellor responded to these words, which had evidently struck her as an insolent sarcasm; and at the same moment Doctor Prance sent Ransom a glance which was an adjuration to depart.

"Good-bye, Olive Chancellor," Miss Birdseye murmured. "I don't want to stay, though I should like to see what you will see."

"I shall see nothing but shame and ruin!" Olive shrieked, rushing across to her old friend, while Ransom discreetly quitted the scene.

XXXIX

He met Doctor Prance in the village the next morning, and as soon as he looked at her he saw that the event which had been impending at Miss Chancellor's had taken place. It was not that her aspect was funereal; but it contained, somehow, an announcement that she had, for the present, no more thought to give to casting a line. Miss Birdseye had quietly passed away, in the evening, an hour or two after Ransom's visit. They had wheeled her chair into the house; there had been nothing to do but wait for complete extinction. Miss Chancellor and Miss Tarrant had sat by her there, without moving, each of her hands in theirs, and she had just melted away, towards eight o'clock. It was a lovely death; Doctor Prance intimated that she had never seen any that she thought more seasonable. She added that she was a good woman—one of the old sort; and that was the only funeral oration that Basil Ransom was destined to hear pronounced upon Miss Birdseye. The impression of the simplicity and humility of her end remained with him, and he reflected more than once, during the days that followed, that the absence of pomp and circumstance which had marked her career marked also the consecration of her memory. She had been almost celebrated, she had been active, earnest, ubiquitous beyond any one else, she had given herself utterly to charities and creeds and causes; and yet

the only persons, apparently, to whom her death made a real difference were three young women in a small "frame-house" on Cape Cod. Ransom learned from Doctor Prance that her mortal remains were to be committed to their rest in the little cemetery at Marmion, in sight of the pretty sea-view she loved to gaze at, among old mossy headstones of mariners and fisher-folk. She had seen the place when she first came down, when she was able to drive out a little, and she had said she thought it must be pleasant to lie there. It was not an injunction, a definite request; it had not occurred to Miss Birdseye, at the end of her days, to take an exacting line or to make, for the first time in eighty years, a personal claim. But Olive Chancellor and Verena had put their construction on her appreciation of the quietest corner of the striving, suffering world so weary a pilgrim of philanthropy had ever beheld.

In the course of the day Ransom received a note of five lines from Verena, the purport of which was to tell him that he must not expect to see her again for the present; she wished to be very quiet and think things over. She added the recommendation that he should leave the neighbourhood for three or four days; there were plenty of strange old places to see in that part of the country. Ransom meditated deeply on this missive, and perceived that he should be guilty of very bad taste in not immediately absenting himself. He knew that to Olive Chancellor's vision his conduct already wore that stain, and it was useless, therefore, for him to consider how he could displease her either less or more. But he wished to convey to Verena the impression that he would do anything in the wide world to gratify *her* except give her up, and as he packed his valise he had an idea that he was both behaving beautifully and showing the finest diplomatic sense. To go away proved to himself how

secure he felt, what a conviction he had that however she might turn and twist in his grasp he held her fast. The emotion she had expressed as he stood there before poor Miss Birdseye was only one of her instinctive contortions ; he had taken due note of that —said to himself that a good many more would probably occur before she would be quiet. A woman that listens is lost, the old proverb says ; and what had Verena done for the last three weeks but listen ? —not very long each day, but with a degree of attention of which her not withdrawing from Marmion was the measure. She had not told him that Olive wanted to whisk her away, but he had not needed this confidence to know that if she stayed on the field it was because she preferred to. She probably had an idea she was fighting, but if she should fight no harder than she had fought up to now he should continue to take the same view of his success. She meant her request that he should go away for a few days as something combative ; but, decidedly, he scarcely felt the blow. He liked to think that he had great tact with women, and he was sure Verena would be struck with this quality in reading, in the note he presently addressed her in reply to her own, that he had determined to take a little run to Provincetown. As there was no one under the rather ineffectual roof which sheltered him to whose hand he could entrust the billet—at the Marmion hotel one had to be one's own messenger—he walked to the village post-office to request that his note should be put into Miss Chancellor's box. Here he met Doctor Prance, for a second time that day ; she had come to deposit the letters by which Olive notified a few of Miss Birdseye's friends of the time and place of her obsequies. This young lady was shut up with Verena, and Doctor Prance was transacting all their business for them. Ransom felt that he made no admission that would impugn his

estimate of the sex to which she in a manner belonged, in reflecting that she would acquit herself of these delegated duties with the greatest rapidity and accuracy. He told her he was going to absent himself for a few days, and expressed a friendly hope that he should find her at Marmion on his return.

Her keen eye gauged him a moment, to see if he were joking; than she said, "Well, I presume you think I can do as I like. But I can't."

"You mean you have got to go back to work?"

"Well, yes; my place is empty in the city."

"So is every other place. You had better remain till the end of the season."

"It's all one season to me. I want to see my office-slate. I wouldn't have stayed so long for any one but her."

"Well, then, good-bye," Ransom said. "I shall always remember our little expeditions. And I wish you every professional distinction."

"That's why I want to go back," Doctor Prance replied, with her flat, limited manner. He kept her a moment; he wanted to ask her about Verena. While he was hesitating how to form his question she remarked, evidently wishing to leave him a little memento of her sympathy, "Well, I hope you will be able to follow up your views."

"My views, Miss Prance? I am sure I have never mentioned them to you!" Then Ransom added, "How is Miss Tarrant to-day? is she more calm?"

"Oh no, she isn't calm at all," Doctor Prance answered, very definitely.

"Do you mean she's excited, emotional?"

"Well, she doesn't talk, she's perfectly still, and so is Miss Chancellor. They're as still as two watchers —they don't speak. But you can hear the silence vibrate."

"Vibrate?"

"Well, they are very nervous."

Ransom was confident, as I say, yet the effort that he made to extract a good omen from this characterisation of the two ladies at the cottage was not altogether successful. He would have liked to ask Doctor Prance whether she didn't think he might count on Verena in the end; but he was too shy for this, the subject of his relations with Miss Tarrant never yet having been touched upon between them; and, besides, he didn't care to hear himself put a question which was more or less an implication of a doubt. So he compromised, with a sort of oblique and general inquiry about Olive; that might draw some light. "What do you think of Miss Chancellor—how does she strike you?"

Doctor Prance reflected a little, with an apparent consciousness that he meant more than he asked. "Well, she's losing flesh," she presently replied; and Ransom turned away, not encouraged, and feeling that, no doubt, the little doctress had better go back to her office-slate.

He did the thing handsomely, remained at Provincetown a week, inhaling the delicious air, smoking innumerable cigars, and lounging among the ancient wharves, where the grass grew thick and the impression of fallen greatness was still stronger than at Marmion. Like his friends the Bostonians he was very nervous; there were days when he felt he must rush back to the margin of that mild inlet; the voices of the air whispered to him that in his absence he was being outwitted. Nevertheless he stayed the time he had determined to stay; quieting himself with the reflexion that there was nothing they could do to elude him unless, perhaps, they should start again for Europe, which they were not likely to do. If Miss Olive tried to hide Verena away in the United States he would undertake to find her—though he was obliged to confess that a flight to Europe

would baffle him, owing to his want of cash for pursuit. Nothing, however, was less probable than that they would cross the Atlantic on the eve of Verena's projected *début* at the Music Hall. Before he went back to Marmion he wrote to this young lady, to announce his reappearance there and let her know that he expected she would come out to meet him the morning after. This conveyed the assurance that he intended to take as much of the day as he could get ; he had had enough of the system of dragging through all the hours till a mere fraction of time was left before night, and he couldn't wait so long, at any rate, the day after his return. It was the afternoon train that had brought him back from Provincetown, and in the evening he ascertained that the Bostonians had not deserted the field. There were lights in the windows of the house under the elms, and he stood where he had stood that evening with Doctor Prance and listened to the waves of Verena's voice, as she rehearsed her lecture. There were no waves this time, no sounds, and no sign of life but the lamps ; the place had apparently not ceased to be given over to the conscious silence described by Doctor Prance. Ransom felt that he gave an immense proof of chivalry in not calling upon Verena to grant him an interview on the spot. She had not answered his last note, but the next day she kept the tryst, at the hour he had proposed ; he saw her advance along the road, in a white dress, under a big parasol, and again he found himself liking immensely the way she walked. He was dismayed, however, at her face and what it portended ; pale, with red eyes, graver than she had ever been before, she appeared to have spent the period of his absence in violent weeping. Yet that it was not for him she had been crying was proved by the very first word she spoke.

"I only came out to tell you definitely it's

impossible! I have thought over everything, taking plenty of time — over and over; and that is my answer, finally, positively. You must take it—you shall have no other."

Basil Ransom gazed, frowning fearfully. "And why not, pray?"

"Because I can't, I can't, I can't, I can't!" she repeated passionately, with her altered, distorted face.

"Damnation!" murmured the young man. He seized her hand, drew it into his arm, forcing her to walk with him along the road.

That afternoon Olive Chancellor came out of her house and wandered for a long time upon the shore. She looked up and down the bay, at the sails that gleamed on the blue water, shifting in the breeze and the light; they were a source of interest to her that they had never been before. It was a day she was destined never to forget; she felt it to be the saddest, the most wounding of her life. Unrest and haunting fear had not possession of her now, as they had held her in New York when Basil Ransom carried off Verena, to mark her for his own, in the park. But an immeasurable load of misery seemed to sit upon her soul; she ached with the bitterness of her melancholy, she was dumb and cold with despair. She had spent the violence of her terror, the eagerness of her grief, and now she was too weary to struggle with fate. She appeared to herself almost to have accepted it, as she wandered forth in the beautiful afternoon with the knowledge that the "ten minutes" which Verena had told her she meant to devote to Mr. Ransom that morning had developed suddenly into an embarkation for the day. They had gone out in a boat together; one of the village worthies, from whom small craft were to be hired, had, at Verena's request, sent his little son to Miss Chancellor's

cottage with that information. She had not understood whether they had taken the boatman with them. Even when the information came (and it came at a moment of considerable reassurance), Olive's nerves were not ploughed up by it as they had been, for instance, by the other expedition, in New York; and she could measure the distance she had traversed since then. It had not driven her away on the instant to pace the shore in frenzy, to challenge every boat that passed, and beg that the young lady who was sailing somewhere in the bay with a dark gentleman with long hair should be entreated immediately to return. On the contrary, after the first quiver of pain inflicted by the news she had been able to occupy herself, to look after her house, to write her morning's letters, to go into her accounts, which she had had some time on her mind. She had wanted to put off thinking, for she knew to what hideous recognitions that would bring her round again. These were summed up in the fact that Verena was now not to be trusted for an hour. She had sworn to her the night before, with a face like a lacerated angel's, that her choice was made, that their union and their work were more to her than any other life could ever be, and that she deeply believed that should she forswear these holy things she would simply waste away, in the end, with remorse and shame. She would see Mr. Ransom just once more, for ten minutes, to utter one or two supreme truths to him, and then they would take up their old, happy, active, fruitful days again, would throw themselves more than ever into their splendid effort. Olive had seen how Verena was moved by Miss Birdseye's death, how at the sight of that unique woman's majestically simple withdrawal from a scene in which she had held every vulgar aspiration, every worldly standard and lure, so cheap, the girl had been touched again with the

spirit of their most confident hours, had flamed up with the faith that no narrow personal joy could compare in sweetness with the idea of doing something for those who had always suffered and who waited still. This helped Olive to believe that she might begin to count upon her again, conscious as she was at the same time that Verena had been strangely weakened and strained by her odious ordeal. Oh, Olive knew that she loved him—knew what the passion was with which the wretched girl had to struggle; and she did her the justice to believe that her professions were sincere, her effort was real. Harassed and embittered as she was, Olive Chancellor still proposed to herself to be rigidly just, and that is why she pitied Verena now with an unspeakable pity, regarded her as the victim of an atrocious spell, and reserved all her execration and contempt for the author of their common misery. If Verena had stepped into a boat with him half an hour after declaring that she would give him his dismissal in twenty words, that was because he had ways, known to himself and other men, of creating situations without an issue, of forcing her to do things she could do only with sharp repugnance, under the menace of pain that would be sharper still. But all the same, what actually stared her in the face was that Verena was not to be trusted, even after rallying again as passionately as she had done during the days that followed Miss Birdseye's death. Olive would have liked to know the pang of penance that *she* would have been afraid, in her place, to incur; to see the locked door which *she* would not have managed to force open!

This inexpressibly mournful sense that, after all, Verena, in her exquisite delicacy and generosity, was appointed only to show how women had from the beginning of time been the sport of men's selfishness

and avidity, this dismal conviction accompanied Olive on her walk, which lasted all the afternoon, and in which she found a kind of tragic relief. She went very far, keeping in the lonely places, unveiling her face to the splendid light, which seemed to make a mock of the darkness and bitterness of her spirit. There were little sandy coves, where the rocks were clean, where she made long stations, sinking down in them as if she hoped she should never rise again. It was the first time she had been out since Miss Birdseye's death, except the hour when, with the dozen sympathisers who came from Boston, she stood by the tired old woman's grave. Since then, for three days, she had been writing letters, narrating, describing to those who hadn't come ; there were some, she thought, who might have managed to do so, instead of despatching her pages of diffuse reminiscence and asking her for all particulars in return. Selah Tarrant and his wife had come, obtrusively, as she thought, for they never had had very much intercourse with Miss Birdseye ; and if it was for Verena's sake, Verena was there to pay every tribute herself. Mrs. Tarrant had evidently hoped Miss Chancellor would ask her to stay on at Marmion, but Olive felt how little she was in a state for such heroics of hospitality. It was precisely in order that she should not have to do that sort of thing that she had given Selah such considerable sums, on two occasions, at a year's interval. If the Tarrants wanted a change of air they could travel all over the country—their present means permitted it ; they could go to Saratoga or Newport if they liked. Their appearance showed that they could put their hands into their pockets (or into hers) ; at least Mrs. Tarrant's did. Selah still sported (on a hot day in August) his immemorial waterproof ; but his wife rustled over the low tombstones at Marmion in garments of which (little as she was versed in such

inquiries) Olive could see that the cost had been large. Besides, after Doctor Prance had gone (when all was over), she felt what a relief it was that Verena and she could be just together—together with the monstrous wedge of a question that had come up between them. That was company enough, great heaven! and she had not got rid of such an inmate as Doctor Prance only to put Mrs. Tarrant in her place.

Did Verena's strange aberration, on this particular day, suggest to Olive that it was no use striving, that the world was all a great trap or trick, of which women were ever the punctual dupes, so that it was the worst of the curse that rested upon them that they must most humiliate those who had most their cause at heart? Did she say to herself that their weakness was not only lamentable but hideous—hideous their predestined subjection to man's larger and grosser insistence? Did she ask herself why she should give up her life to save a sex which, after all, didn't wish to be saved, and which rejected the truth even after it had bathed them with its auroral light and they had pretended to be fed and fortified? These are mysteries into which I shall not attempt to enter, speculations with which I have no concern; it is sufficient for us to know that all human effort had never seemed to her so barren and thankless as on that fatal afternoon. Her eyes rested on the boats she saw in the distance, and she wondered if in one of them Verena were floating to her fate; but so far from straining forward to beckon her home she almost wished that she might glide away for ever, that *she* might never see her again, never undergo the horrible details of a more deliberate separation. Olive lived over, in her miserable musings, her life for the last two years; she knew, again, how noble and beautiful her scheme had been, but how it had all rested on an illusion of which the very thought made

her feel faint and sick. What was before her now was the reality, with the beautiful, indifferent sky pouring down its complacent rays upon it. The reality was simply that Verena had been more to her than she ever was to Verena, and that, with her exquisite natural art, the girl had cared for their cause only because, for the time, no interest, no fascination, was greater. Her talent, the talent which was to achieve such wonders, was nothing to her ; it was too easy, she could leave it alone, as she might close her piano, for months ; it was only to Olive that it was everything. Verena had submitted, she had responded, she had lent herself to Olive's incitement and exhortation, because she was sympathetic and young and abundant and fanciful ; but it had been a kind of hothouse loyalty, the mere contagion of example, and a sentiment springing up from within had easily breathed a chill upon it. Did Olive ask herself whether, for so many months, her companion had been only the most unconscious and most successful of humbugs ? Here again I must plead a certain incompetence to give an answer. Positive it is that she spared herself none of the inductions of a reverie that seemed to dry up the mists and ambiguities of life. These hours of backward clearness come to all men and women, once at least, when they read the past in the light of the present, with the reasons of things, like unobserved finger-posts, protruding where they never saw them before. The journey behind them is mapped out and figured, with its false steps, its wrong observations, all its infatuated, deluded geography. They understand as Olive understood, but it is probable that they rarely suffer as she suffered. The sense of regret for her baffled calculations burned within her like a fire, and the splendour of the vision over which the curtain of mourning now was dropped brought to her eyes slow, still tears, tears that came

one by one, neither easing her nerves nor lightening her load of pain. She thought of her innumerable talks with Verena, of the pledges they had exchanged, of their earnest studies, their faithful work, their certain reward, the winter nights under the lamp, when they thrilled with previsions as just and a passion as high as had ever found shelter in a pair of human hearts. The pity of it, the misery of such a fall after such a flight, could express itself only, as the poor girl prolonged the vague pauses of her unnoticed ramble, in a low, inarticulate murmur of anguish.

The afternoon waned, bringing with it the slight chill which, at the summer's end, begins to mark the shortening days. She turned her face homeward, and by this time became conscious that if Verena's companion had not yet brought her back there might be ground for uneasiness as to what had happened to them. It seemed to her that no sail-boat could have put into the town without passing more or less before her eyes and showing her whom it carried; she had seen a dozen, freighted only with the figures of men. An accident was perfectly possible (what could Ransom, with his plantation habits, know about the management of a sail ?), and once that danger loomed before her—the signal loveliness of the weather had prevented its striking her before—Olive's imagination hurried, with a bound, to the worst. She saw the boat overturned and drifting out to sea, and (after a week of nameless horror) the body of an unknown young woman, defaced beyond recognition, but with long auburn hair and in a white dress, washed up in some far-away cove. An hour before, her mind had rested with a sort of relief on the idea that Verena should sink for ever beneath the horizon, so that their tremendous trouble might never be; but now, with the lateness of the hour, a sharp, immediate anxiety

took the place of that intended resignation ; and she quickened her step, with a heart that galloped too as she went. Then it was, above all, that she felt how *she* had understood friendship, and how never again to see the face of the creature she had taken to her soul would be for her as the stroke of blindness. The twilight had become thick by the time she reached Marmion and paused for an instant in front of her house, over which the elms that stood on the grassy wayside appeared to her to hang a blacker curtain than ever before.

There was no candle in any window, and when she pushed in and stood in the hall, listening a moment, her step awakened no answering sound. Her heart failed her ; Verena's staying out in a boat from ten o'clock in the morning till nightfall was too unnatural, and she gave a cry, as she rushed into the low, dim parlour (darkened on one side, at that hour, by the wide-armed foliage, and on the other by the veranda and trellis), which expressed only a wild personal passion, a desire to take her friend in her arms again on any terms, even the most cruel to herself. The next moment she started back, with another and a different exclamation, for Verena was in the room, motionless, in a corner—the first place in which she had seated herself on re-entering the house—looking at her with a silent face which seemed strange, unnatural, in the dusk. Olive stopped short, and for a minute the two women remained as they were, gazing at each other in the dimness. After that, too, Olive still said nothing ; she only went to Verena and sat down beside her. She didn't know what to make of her manner ; she had never been like that before. She was unwilling to speak ; she seemed crushed and humbled. This was almost the worst—if anything could be worse than what had gone before ; and Olive took her hand with an irresistible impulse of

compassion and assurance. From the way it lay in her own she guessed her whole feeling—saw it was a kind of shame, shame for her weakness, her swift surrender, her insane gyration, in the morning. Verena expressed it by no protest and no explanation ; she appeared not even to wish to hear the sound of her own voice. Her silence itself was an appeal—an appeal to Olive to ask no questions (she could trust her to inflict no spoken reproach) ; only to wait till she could lift up her head again. Olive understood, or thought she understood, and the woefulness of it all only seemed the deeper. She would just sit there and hold her hand ; that was all she could do ; they were beyond each other's help in any other way now. Verena leaned her head back and closed her eyes, and for an hour, as nightfall settled in the room, neither of the young women spoke. Distinctly, it was a kind of shame. After a while the parlour-maid, very casual, in the manner of the servants at Marmion, appeared on the threshold with a lamp ; but Olive motioned her frantically away. She wished to keep the darkness. It was a kind of shame.

The next morning Basil Ransom rapped loudly with his walking-stick on the lintel of Miss Chancellor's house-door, which, as usual on fine days, stood open. There was no need he should wait till the servant had answered his summons ; for Olive, who had reason to believe he would come, and who had been lurking in the sitting-room for a purpose of her own, stepped forth into the little hall.

" I am sorry to disturb you ; I had the hope that—for a moment—I might see Miss Tarrant." That was the speech with which (and a measured salutation) he greeted his advancing kinswoman. She faced him an instant, and her strange green eyes caught the light.

" It's impossible. You may believe that when I say it."

"Why is it impossible?" he asked, smiling in spite of an inward displeasure. And as Olive gave him no answer, only gazing at him with a cold audacity which he had not hitherto observed in her, he added a little explanation. "It is simply to have seen her before I go—to have said five words to her. I want her to know that I have made up my mind—since yesterday—to leave this place; I shall take the train at noon."

It was not to gratify Olive Chancellor that he had determined to go away, or even that he told her this; yet he was surprised that his words brought no expression of pleasure to her face. "I don't think it is of much importance whether you go away or not. Miss Tarrant herself has gone away."

"Miss Tarrant—gone away?" This announcement was so much at variance with Verena's apparent intentions the night before that his ejaculation expressed chagrin as well as surprise, and in doing so it gave Olive a momentary advantage. It was the only one she had ever had, and the poor girl may be excused for having enjoyed it—so far as enjoyment was possible to her. Basil Ransom's visible discomfiture was more agreeable to her than anything had been for a long time.

"I went with her myself to the early train; and I saw it leave the station." And Olive kept her eyes unaverted, for the satisfaction of seeing how he took it.

It must be confessed that he took it rather ill. He had decided it was best he should retire, but Verena's retiring was another matter. "And where is she gone?" he asked, with a frown.

"I don't think I am obliged to tell you."

"Of course not! Excuse my asking. It is much better that I should find it out for myself, because if I owed the information to you I should perhaps feel a certain delicacy as regards profiting by it."

"Gracious heaven!" cried Miss Chancellor, at the idea of Ransom's delicacy. Then she added more deliberately: "You will not find out for yourself."

"You think not?"

"I am sure of it!" And her enjoyment of the situation becoming acute, there broke from her lips a shrill, unfamiliar, troubled sound, which performed the office of a laugh, a laugh of triumph, but which, at a distance, might have passed almost as well for a wail of despair. It rang in Ransom's ears as he quickly turned away.

XL

It was Mrs. Luna who received him, as she had received him on the occasion of his first visit to Charles Street; by which I do not mean quite in the same way. She had known very little about him then, but she knew too much for her happiness to-day, and she had with him now a little invidious, contemptuous manner, as if everything he should say or do could be a proof only of abominable duplicity and perversity. She had a theory that he had treated her shamefully; and he knew it—I do not mean the fact, but the theory: which led him to reflect that her resentments were as shallow as her opinions, inasmuch as if she really believed in her grievance, or if it had had any dignity, she would not have consented to see him. He had not presented himself at Miss Chancellor's door without a very good reason, and having done so he could not turn away so long as there was any one in the house of whom he might have speech. He had sent up his name to Mrs. Luna, after being told that she was staying there, on the mere chance that she would see him; for he thought a refusal a very possible sequel to the letters she had written him during the past four or five months—letters he had scarcely read, full of allusions of the most cutting sort to proceedings of his, in the past, of which he had no recollection whatever. They bored him, for he had quite other matters in his mind.

"I don't wonder you have the bad taste, the

crudity," she said, as soon as he came into the room, looking at him more sternly than he would have believed possible to her.

He saw that this was an allusion to his not having been to see her since the period of her sister's visit to New York; he having conceived for her, the evening of Mrs. Burrage's party, a sentiment of aversion which put an end to such attentions. He didn't laugh, he was too worried and preoccupied; but he replied, in a tone which apparently annoyed her as much as any indecent mirth: "I thought it very possible you wouldn't see me."

"Why shouldn't I see you, if I should take it into my head? Do you suppose I care whether I see you or not?"

"I supposed you wanted to, from your letters."

"Then why did you think I would refuse?"

"Because that's the sort of thing women do."

"Women — women! You know much about them!"

"I am learning something every day."

"You haven't learned yet, apparently, to answer their letters. It's rather a surprise to me that you don't pretend not to have received mine."

Ransom could smile now; the opportunity to vent the exasperation that had been consuming him almost restored his good humour. "What could I say? You overwhelmed me. Besides, I did answer one of them."

"One of them? You speak as if I had written you a dozen!" Mrs. Luna cried.

"I thought that was your contention—that you had done me the honour to address me so many. They were crushing, and when a man's crushed, it's all over."

"Yes, you look as if you were in very small pieces! I am glad that I shall never see you again."

"I can see now why you received me—to tell me that," Ransom said.

"It is a kind of pleasure. I am going back to Europe."

"Really? for Newton's education?"

"Ah, I wonder you can have the face to speak of that—after the way you deserted him!"

"Let us abandon the subject, then, and I will tell you what I want."

"I don't in the least care what you want," Mrs. Luna remarked. "And you haven't even the grace to ask me where I am going—over there."

"What difference does that make to me—once you leave these shores?"

Mrs. Luna rose to her feet. "Ah, chivalry, chivalry!" she exclaimed. And she walked away to the window—one of the windows from which Ransom had first enjoyed, at Olive's solicitation, the view of the Back Bay. Mrs. Luna looked forth at it with little of the air of a person who was sorry to be about to lose it. "I am determined you shall know where I am going," she said in a moment. "I am going to Florence."

"Don't be afraid!" he replied. "I shall go to Rome."

"And you'll carry there more impertinence than has been seen there since the old emperors."

"Were the emperors impertinent, in addition to their other vices? I am determined, on my side, that you shall know what I have come for," Ransom said. "I wouldn't ask you if I could ask any one else; but I am very hard pressed, and I don't know who can help me."

Mrs. Luna turned on him a face of the frankest derision. "Help you? Do you remember the last time I asked you to help me?"

"That evening at Mrs. Burrage's? Surely I wasn't

wanting then ; I remember urging on your acceptance a chair, so that you might stand on it, to see and to hear."

" To see and to hear what, please ? Your disgusting infatuation ! "

" It's just about that I want to speak to you," Ransom pursued. " As you already know all about it, you have no new shock to receive, and I therefore venture to ask you——"

" Where tickets for her lecture to-night can be obtained ? Is it possible she hasn't sent you one ? "

" I assure you I didn't come to Boston to hear it," said Ransom, with a sadness which Mrs. Luna evidently regarded as a refinement of outrage. " What I should like to ascertain is where Miss Tarrant may be found at the present moment."

" And do you think that's a delicate inquiry to make of *me* ? "

" I don't see why it shouldn't be, but I know you don't think it is, and that is why, as I say, I mention the matter to you only because I can imagine absolutely no one else who is in a position to assist me. I have been to the house of Miss Tarrant's parents, in Cambridge, but it is closed and empty, destitute of any sign of life. I went there first, on arriving this morning, and rang at this door only when my journey to Monadnoc Place had proved fruitless. Your sister's servant told me that Miss Tarrant was not staying here, but she added that Mrs. Luna was. No doubt you won't be pleased at having been spoken of as a sort of equivalent ; and I didn't say to myself —or to the servant—that you would do as well ; I only reflected that I could at least try you. I didn't even ask for Miss Chancellor, as I am sure she would give me no information whatever."

Mrs. Luna listened to this candid account of the young man's proceedings with her head turned a little

over her shoulder at him, and her eyes fixed as unsympathetically as possible upon his own. "What you propose, then, as I understand it," she said in a moment, "is that I should betray my sister to you."

"Worse than that; I propose that you should betray Miss Tarrant herself."

"What do I care about Miss Tarrant? I don't know what you are talking about."

"Haven't you really any idea where she is living? Haven't you seen her here? Are Miss Olive and she not constantly together?"

Mrs. Luna, at this, turned full round upon him, and, with folded arms and her head tossed back, exclaimed: "Look here, Basil Ransom, I never thought you were a fool, but it strikes me that since we last met you have lost your wits!"

"There is no doubt of that," Ransom answered, smiling.

"Do you mean to tell me you don't know everything about Miss Tarrant that can be known?"

"I have neither seen her nor heard of her for the last ten weeks; Miss Chancellor has hidden her away."

"Hidden her away, with all the walls and fences of Boston flaming to-day with her name?"

"Oh yes, I have noticed that, and I have no doubt that by waiting till this evening I shall be able to see her. But I don't want to wait till this evening; I want to see her now, and not in public—in private."

"Do you indeed?—how interesting!" cried Mrs. Luna, with rippling laughter. "And pray what do you want to do with her?"

Ransom hesitated a little. "I think I would rather not tell you."

"Your charming frankness, then, has its limits! My poor cousin, you are really too *naïf*. Do you suppose it matters a straw to me?"

Ransom made no answer to this appeal, but after an instant he broke out: "Honestly, Mrs. Luna, can you give me no clue?"

"Lord, what terrible eyes you make, and what terrible words you use! 'Honestly,' quoth he! Do you think I am so fond of the creature that I want to keep her all to myself?"

"I don't know; I don't understand," said Ransom, slowly and softly, but still with his terrible eyes.

"And do you think I understand any better? You are not a very edifying young man," Mrs. Luna went on; "but I really think you have deserved a better fate than to be jilted and thrown over by a girl of that class."

"I haven't been jilted. I like her very much, but she never encouraged me."

At this Mrs. Luna broke again into articulate scoffing. "It is very odd that at your age you should be so little a man of the world!"

Ransom made her no other answer than to remark, thoughtfully and rather absently: "Your sister is really very clever."

"By which you mean, I suppose, that I am not!" Mrs. Luna suddenly changed her tone, and said, with the greatest sweetness and humility: "God knows, I have never pretended to be!"

Ransom looked at her a moment, and guessed the meaning of this altered note. It had suddenly come over her that with her portrait in half the shop-fronts, her advertisement on all the fences, and the great occasion on which she was to reveal herself to the country at large close at hand, Verena had become so conscious of high destinies that her dear friend's Southern kinsman really appeared to her very small game, and she might therefore be regarded as having cast him off. If this were the case, it would perhaps be well for Mrs. Luna still to hold on. Basil's induc-

tion was very rapid, but it gave him time to decide that the best thing to say to his interlocutress was: "On what day do you sail for Europe?"

"Perhaps I shall not sail at all," Mrs. Luna replied, looking out of the window.

"And in that case—poor Newton's education?"

"I should try to content myself with a country which has given you yours."

"Don't you want him, then, to be a man of the world?"

"Ah, the world, the world!" she murmured, while she watched, in the deepening dusk, the lights of the town begin to reflect themselves in the Back Bay. "Has it been such a source of happiness to me that I belong to it?"

"Perhaps, after all, I shall be able to go to Florence!" said Ransom, laughing.

She faced him once more, this time slowly, and declared that she had never known anything so strange as his state of mind—she would be so glad to have an explanation of it. With the opinions he professed (it was for them she had liked him—she didn't like his character), why on earth should he be running after a little fifth-rate *poseuse*, and in such a frenzy to get hold of her? He might say it was none of her business, and of course she would have no answer to that; therefore she admitted that she asked simply out of intellectual curiosity, and because one always was tormented at the sight of a painful contradiction. With the things she had heard him say about his convictions and theories, his view of life and the great questions of the future, she should have thought he would find Miss Tarrant's attitudinising absolutely nauseous. Were not her views the same as Olive's and hadn't Olive and he signally failed to hit it off together? Mrs. Luna only asked because she was really quite puzzled. "Don't you know that

some minds, when they see a mystery, can't rest till they clear it up ? "

" You can't be more puzzled than I am," said Ransom. " Apparently the explanation is to be found in a sort of reversal of the formula you were so good, just now, as to apply to me. You like my opinions, but you entertain a different sentiment for my character. I deplore Miss Tarrant's opinions, but her character—well, her character pleases me."

Mrs. Luna stared, as if she were waiting, the explanation surely not being complete. " But as much as that ? " she inquired.

" As much as what ? " said Ransom, smiling. Then he added, " Your sister has beaten me."

" I thought she had beaten some one of late ; she has seemed so gay and happy. I didn't suppose it was *all* because I was going away."

" Has she seemed very gay ? " Ransom inquired, with a sinking of the heart. He wore such a long face, as he asked this question, that Mrs. Luna was again moved to audible mirth, after which she explained :

" Of course I mean gay for her. Everything is relative. With her impatience for this lecture of her friend's to-night, she's in an unspeakable state ! She can't sit still for three minutes, she goes out fifteen times a day, and there has been enough arranging and interviewing, and discussing and telegraphing and advertising, enough wire-pulling and rushing about, to put an army in the field. What is it they are always doing to the armies in Europe ?—mobilising them ? Well, Verena has been mobilised, and this has been headquarters."

" And shall you go to the Music Hall to-night ? "

" For what do you take me ? I have no desire to be shrieked at for an hour."

" No doubt, no doubt, Miss Olive must be in a

state," Ransom went on, rather absently. Then he said, with abruptness, in a different tone: "If this house has been, as you say, headquarters, how comes it you haven't seen her?"

"Seen Olive? I have seen nothing else!"

"I mean Miss Tarrant. She must be somewhere —in the place—if she's to speak to-night."

"Should you like me to go out and look for her? *Il ne manquerait plus que cela!*" cried Mrs. Luna. "What's the matter with you, Basil Ransom, and what are you after?" she demanded, with considerable sharpness. She had tried haughtiness and she had tried humility, but they brought her equally face to face with a competitor whom she couldn't take seriously, yet who was none the less objectionable for all that.

I know not whether Ransom would have attempted to answer her question had an obstacle not presented itself; at any rate, at the moment she spoke, the curtain in the doorway was pushed aside, and a visitor crossed the threshold. "Mercy! how provoking!" Mrs. Luna exclaimed, audibly enough; and without moving from her place she bent an uncharitable eye upon the invader, a gentleman whom Ransom had the sense of having met before. He was a young man with a fresh face and abundant locks, prematurely white; he stood smiling at Mrs. Luna, quite undaunted by the absence of any demonstration in his favour. She looked as if she didn't know him, while Ransom prepared to depart, leaving them to settle it together.

"I'm afraid you don't remember me, though I have seen you before," said the young man, very amiably. "I was here a week ago, and Miss Chancellor presented me to you."

"Oh yes; she's not at home now," Mrs. Luna returned vaguely.

"So I was told—but I didn't let that prevent me." And the young man included Basil Ransom in the smile with which he made himself more welcome than Mrs. Luna appeared disposed to make him, and by which he seemed to call attention to his superiority. "There is a matter on which I want very much to obtain some information, and I have no doubt you will be so good as to give it to me."

"It comes back to me—you have something to do with the newspapers," said Mrs. Luna; and Ransom too, by this time, had placed the young man among his reminiscences. He had been at Miss Birdseye's famous party, and Doctor Prance had there described him as a brilliant journalist.

It was quite with the air of such a personage that he accepted Mrs. Luna's definition, and he continued to radiate towards Ransom (as if, in return, he remembered *his* face), while he dropped, confidentially, the word that expressed everything—"The *Vesper*, don't you know?" Then he went on: "Now, Mrs. Luna, I don't care, I'm not going to let you off! We want the last news about Miss Verena, and it has got to come out of this house."

"Oh murder!" Ransom muttered, beneath his breath, taking up his hat.

"Miss Chancellor has hidden her away; I have been scouring the city in search of her, and her own father hasn't seen her for a week. We have got his ideas; they are very easy to get, but that isn't what we want."

"And what do you want?" Ransom was now impelled to inquire, as Mr. Pardon (even the name at present came back to him) appeared sufficiently to have introduced himself.

"We want to know how she feels about to-night; what report she makes of her nerves, her anticipations; how she looked, what she had on, up to six o'clock.

Gracious! if I could see her I should know what I wanted, and so would she, I guess!" Mr. Pardon exclaimed. "You must know something, Mrs. Luna; it isn't natural you shouldn't. I won't inquire any further where she is, because that might seem a little pushing, if she does wish to withdraw herself—though I am bound to say I think she makes a mistake; we could work up these last hours for her! But can't you tell me any little personal items—the sort of thing the people like? What is she going to have for supper? or is she going to speak—a—without previous nourishment?"

"Really, sir, I don't know, and I don't in the least care; I have nothing to do with the business!" Mrs. Luna cried angrily.

The reporter stared; then, eagerly, "You have nothing to do with it—you take an unfavourable view, you protest?" And he was already feeling in a side-pocket for his notebook.

"Mercy on us! are you going to put *that* in the paper?" Mrs. Luna exclaimed; and in spite of the sense, detestable to him, that everything he wished most to avert was fast closing over the girl, Ransom broke into cynical laughter.

"Ah, but do protest, madam; let us at least have that fragment!" Mr. Pardon went on. "A protest from this house would be a charming note. We *must* have it—we've got nothing else! The public are almost as much interested in your sister as they are in Miss Verena; they know to what extent she has backed her: and I should be so delighted (I see the heading, from here, so attractive!) just to take down 'What Miss Chancellor's Family Think about It!'"

Mrs. Luna sank into the nearest chair, with a groan, covering her face with her hands. "Heaven help me, I am glad I am going to Europe!"

"That is another little item—everything counts," said Matthias Pardon, making a rapid entry in his tablets. "May I inquire whether you are going to Europe in consequence of your disapproval of your sister's views?"

Mrs. Luna sprang up again, almost snatching the memoranda out of his hand. "If you have the impertinence to publish a word about me, or to mention my name in print, I will come to your office and make such a scene!"

"Dearest lady, that would be a godsend!" Mr. Pardon cried enthusiastically; but he put his note-book back into his pocket.

"Have you made an exhaustive search for Miss Tarrant?" Basil Ransom asked of him. Mr. Pardon, at this inquiry, eyed him with a sudden, familiar archness, expressive of the idea of competition; so that Ransom added: "You needn't be afraid, I'm not a reporter."

"I didn't know but what you had come on from New York."

"So I have—but not as the representative of a newspaper."

"Fancy his taking you——" Mrs. Luna murmured, with indignation.

"Well, I have been everywhere I could think of," Mr. Pardon remarked. "I have been hunting round after your sister's agent, but I haven't been able to catch up with him; I suppose he has been hunting on his side. Miss Chancellor told me—Mrs. Luna may remember it—that she shouldn't be here at all during the week, and that she preferred not to tell me either where or how she was to spend her time until the momentous evening. Of course I let her know that I should find out if I could, and you may remember," he said to Mrs. Luna, "the conversation we had on the subject. I remarked, candidly, that if they didn't

look out they would overdo the quietness. Doctor Tarrant has felt very low about it. However, I have done what I could with the material at my command, and the *Vesper* has let the public know that her whereabouts was the biggest mystery of the season. It's difficult to get round the *Vesper*."

"I am almost afraid to open my lips in your presence," Mrs. Luna broke in, "but I must say that I think my sister was strangely communicative. She told you ever so much that I wouldn't have breathed."

"I should like to try you with something you know!" Matthias Pardon returned imperturbably. "This isn't a fair trial, because you don't know. Miss Chancellor came round—came round considerably, there's no doubt of that; because a year or two ago she was terribly unapproachable. If I have mollified her, madam, why shouldn't I mollify you? She realises that I can help her now, and as I ain't rancorous I am willing to help her all she'll let me. The trouble is, she won't let me enough, yet; it seems as if she couldn't believe it of me. At any rate," he pursued, addressing himself more particularly to Ransom, "half an hour ago, at the Hall, they knew nothing whatever about Miss Tarrant, beyond the fact that about a month ago she came there, with Miss Chancellor, to try her voice, which rang all over the place, like silver, and that Miss Chancellor guaranteed her absolute punctuality to-night."

"Well, that's all that is required," said Ransom, at hazard; and he put out his hand, in farewell, to Mrs. Luna.

"Do you desert me already?" she demanded, giving him a glance which would have embarrassed any spectator but a reporter of the *Vesper*.

"I have fifty things to do; you must excuse me." He was nervous, restless, his heart was beating much

faster than usual; he couldn't stand still, and he had no compunction whatever about leaving her to get rid, by herself, of Mr. Pardon.

This gentleman continued to mix in the conversation, possibly from the hope that if he should linger either Miss Tarrant or Miss Chancellor would make her appearance. "Every seat in the Hall is sold; the crowd is expected to be immense. When our Boston public *does* take an idea!" Mr. Pardon exclaimed.

Ransom only wanted to get away, and in order to facilitate his release by implying that in such a case he should see her again, he said to Mrs. Luna, rather hypocritically, from the threshold, "You had really better come to-night."

"I am not like the Boston public—I don't take an idea!" she replied.

"Do you mean to say you are not going?" cried Mr. Pardon, with widely open eyes, clapping his hand again to his pocket. "Don't you regard her as a wonderful genius?"

Mrs. Luna was sorely tried, and the vexation of seeing Ransom slip away from her with his thoughts visibly on Verena, leaving her face to face with the odious newspaper man, whose presence made passionate protest impossible—the annoyance of seeing everything and every one mock at her and fail to compensate her was such that she lost her head, while rashness leaped to her lips and jerked out the answer —"No indeed; I think her a vulgar idiot!"

"Ah, madam, I should never permit myself to print that!" Ransom heard Mr. Pardon rejoin reproachfully, as he dropped the *portière* of the drawing-room.

XLI

He walked about for the next two hours, walked all over Boston, heedless of his course, and conscious only of an unwillingness to return to his hotel and an inability to eat his dinner or rest his weary legs. He had been roaming in very much the same desperate fashion, at once eager and purposeless, for many days before he left New York, and he knew that his agitation and suspense must wear themselves out. At present they pressed him more than ever; they had become tremendously acute. The early dusk of the last half of November had gathered thick, but the evening was fine and the lighted streets had the animation and variety of a winter that had begun with brilliancy. The shop-fronts glowed through frosty panes, the passers bustled on the pavement, the bells of the street-cars jangled in the cold air, the newsboys hawked the evening papers, the vestibules of the theatres, illuminated and flanked with coloured posters and the photographs of actresses, exhibited seductively their swinging doors of red leather or baize, spotted with little brass nails. Behind great plates of glass the interior of the hotels became visible, with marble-paved lobbies, white with electric lamps, and columns, and Westerners on divans stretching their legs, while behind a counter, set apart and covered with an array of periodicals and novels in paper covers, little boys, with the faces of old men, showing plans

of the play-houses and offering librettos, sold orchestra-chairs at a premium. When from time to time Ransom paused at a corner, hesitating which way to drift, he looked up and saw the stars, sharp and near, scintillating over the town. Boston seemed to him big and full of nocturnal life, very much awake and preparing for an evening of pleasure.

He passed and repassed the Music Hall, saw Verena immensely advertised, gazed down the vista, the approach for pedestrians, which leads out of School Street, and thought it looked expectant and ominous. People had not begun to enter yet, but the place was ready, lighted and open, and the interval would be only too short. So it appeared to Ransom, while at the same time he wished immensely the crisis were over. Everything that surrounded him referred itself to the idea with which his mind was palpitating, the question whether he might not still intervene as against the girl's jump into the abyss. He believed that all Boston was going to hear her, or that at least every one was whom he saw in the streets ; and there was a kind of incentive and inspiration in this thought. The vision of wresting her from the mighty multitude set him off again, to stride through the population that would fight for her. It was not too late, for he felt strong ; it would not be too late even if she should already stand there before thousands of converging eyes. He had had his ticket since the morning, and now the time was going on. He went back to his hotel at last for ten minutes, and refreshed himself by dressing a little and by drinking a glass of wine. Then he took his way once more to the Music Hall, and saw that people were beginning to go in— the first drops of the great stream, among whom there were many women. Since seven o'clock the minutes had moved fast — before that they had dragged— and now there was only half an hour. Ransom

passed in with the others; he knew just where his seat was; he had chosen it, on reaching Boston, from the few that were left, with what he believed to be care. But now, as he stood beneath the far-away panelled roof, stretching above the line of little tongues of flame which marked its junction with the walls, he felt that this didn't matter much, since he certainly was not going to subside into his place. He was not one of the audience; he was apart, unique, and had come on a business altogether special. It wouldn't have mattered if, in advance, he had got no place at all and had just left himself to pay for standing-room at the last. The people came pouring in, and in a very short time there would only be standing-room left. Ransom had no definite plan; he had mainly wanted to get inside of the building, so that, on a view of the field, he might make up his mind. He had never been in the Music Hall before, and its lofty vaults and rows of overhanging balconies made it to his imagination immense and impressive. There were two or three moments during which he felt as he could imagine a young man to feel who, waiting in a public place, has made up his mind, for reasons of his own, to discharge a pistol at the king or the president.

The place struck him with a kind of Roman vastness; the doors which opened out of the upper balconies, high aloft, and which were constantly swinging to and fro with the passage of spectators and ushers, reminded him of the *vomitoria* that he had read about in descriptions of the Colosseum. The huge organ, the background of the stage—a stage occupied with tiers of seats for choruses and civic worthies—lifted to the dome its shining pipes and sculptured pinnacles, and some genius of music or oratory erected himself in monumental bronze at the base. The hall was so capacious and serious, and the audience increased so rapidly without filling

it, giving Ransom a sense of the numbers it would contain when it was packed, that the courage of the two young women, face to face with so tremendous an ordeal, hovered before him as really sublime, especially the conscious tension of poor Olive, who would have been spared none of the anxieties and tremors, none of the previsions of accident or calculations of failure. In the front of the stage was a slim, high desk, like a music-stand, with a cover of red velvet, and near it was a light ornamental chair, on which he was sure Verena would not seat herself, though he could fancy her leaning at moments on the back. Behind this was a kind of semicircle of a dozen arm-chairs, which had evidently been arranged for the friends of the speaker, her sponsors and patrons. The hall was more and more full of premonitory sounds; people making a noise as they unfolded, on hinges, their seats, and itinerant boys, whose voices as they cried out "Photographs of Miss Tarrant—sketch of her life!" or "Portraits of the Speaker—story of her career!" sounded small and piping in the general immensity. Before Ransom was aware of it several of the arm-chairs, in the row behind the lecturer's desk, were occupied, with gaps, and in a moment he recognised, even across the interval, three of the persons who had appeared. The straight-featured woman with bands of glossy hair and eyebrows that told at a distance, could only be Mrs. Farrinder, just as the gentleman beside her, in a white overcoat, with an umbrella and a vague face, was probably her husband Amariah. At the opposite end of the row were another pair, whom Ransom, unacquainted with certain chapters of Verena's history, perceived without surprise to be Mrs. Burrage and her insinuating son. Apparently their interest in Miss Tarrant was more than a momentary fad, since—like himself—they had made the

journey from New York to hear her. There were other figures, unknown to our young man, here and there, in the semicircle ; but several places were still empty (one of which was of course reserved for Olive), and it occurred to Ransom, even in his preoccupation, that one of them ought to remain so—ought to be left to symbolise the presence, in the spirit, of Miss Birdseye.

He bought one of the photographs of Verena, and thought it shockingly bad, and bought also the sketch of her life, which many people seemed to be reading, but crumpled it up in his pocket for future consideration. Verena was not in the least present to him in connexion with this exhibition of enterprise and puffery ; what he saw was Olive, struggling and yielding, making every sacrifice of taste for the sake of the largest hearing, and conforming herself to a great popular system. Whether she had struggled or not, there was a catch-penny effect about the whole thing which added to the fever in his cheek and made him wish he had money to buy up the stock of the vociferous little boys. Suddenly the notes of the organ rolled out into the hall, and he became aware that the overture or prelude had begun. This, too, seemed to him a piece of claptrap, but he didn't wait to think of it ; he instantly edged out of his place, which he had chosen near the end of a row, and reached one of the numerous doors. If he had had no definite plan he now had at least an irresistible impulse, and he felt the prick of shame at having faltered for a moment. It had been his tacit calculation that Verena, still enshrined in mystery by her companion, would not have reached the scene of her performance till within a few minutes of the time at which she was to come forth ; so that he had lost nothing by waiting, up to this moment, before the platform. But now he must overtake his opportunity.

Before passing out of the hall into the lobby he paused, and with his back to the stage, gave a look at the gathered auditory. It had become densely numerous, and, suffused with the evenly distributed gaslight, which fell from a great elevation, and the thick atmosphere that hangs for ever in such places, it appeared to pile itself high and to look dimly expectant and formidable. He had a throb of uneasiness at his private purpose of balking it of its entertainment, its victim—a glimpse of the ferocity that lurks in a disappointed mob. But the thought of that danger only made him pass more quickly through the ugly corridors; he felt that his plan was definite enough now, and he found that he had no need even of asking the way to a certain small door (one or more of them), which he meant to push open. In taking his place in the morning he had assured himself as to the side of the house on which (with its approach to the platform) the withdrawing room of singers and speakers was situated; he had chosen his seat in that quarter, and he now had not far to go before he reached it. No one heeded or challenged him; Miss Tarrant's auditors were still pouring in (the occasion was evidently to have been an unprecedented success of curiosity), and had all the attention of the ushers. Ransom opened a door at the end of the passage, and it admitted him into a sort of vestibule, quite bare save that at a second door, opposite to him, stood a figure at the sight of which he paused for a moment in his advance.

The figure was simply that of a robust policeman, in his helmet and brass buttons—a policeman who was expecting him—Ransom could see that in a twinkling. He judged in the same space of time that Olive Chancellor had heard of his having arrived and had applied for the protection of this functionary, who was now simply guarding the ingress and was

prepared to defend it against all comers. There was a slight element of surprise in this, as he had reasoned that his nervous kinswoman was absent from her house for the day—had been spending it all in Verena's retreat, wherever that was. The surprise was not great enough, however, to interrupt his course for more than an instant, and he crossed the room and stood before the belted sentinel. For a moment neither spoke ; they looked at each other very hard in the eyes, and Ransom heard the organ, beyond partitions, launching its waves of sound through the hall. They seemed to be very near it, and the whole place vibrated. The policeman was a tall, lean-faced, sallow man, with a stoop of the shoulders, a small, steady eye, and something in his mouth which made a protuberance in his cheek. Ransom could see that he was very strong, but he believed that he himself was not materially less so. However, he had not come there to show physical fight—a public tussle about Verena was not an attractive idea, except perhaps, after all, if he should get the worst of it, from the point of view of Olive's new system of advertising ; and, moreover, it would not be in the least necessary. Still he said nothing, and still the policeman remained dumb, and there was something in the way the moments elapsed and in our young man's consciousness that Verena was separated from him only by a couple of thin planks, which made him feel that she too expected him, but in another sense ; that she had nothing to do with this parade of resistance, that she would know in a moment, by quick intuition, that he was there, and that she was only praying to be rescued, to be saved. Face to face with Olive she hadn't the courage, but she would have it with her hand in his. It came to him that there was no one in the world less sure of her business just at that moment than Olive

Chancellor; it was as if he could see, through the door, the terrible way her eyes were fixed on Verena while she held her watch in her hand and Verena looked away from her. Olive would have been so thankful that she should begin before the hour, but of course that was impossible. Ransom asked no questions—that seemed a waste of time; he only said, after a minute, to the policeman:

"I should like very much to see Miss Tarrant, if you will be so good as to take in my card."

The guardian of order, well planted just between him and the handle of the door, took from Ransom the morsel of pasteboard which he held out to him, read slowly the name inscribed on it, turned it over and looked at the back, then returned it to his interlocutor. "Well, I guess it ain't much use," he remarked.

"How can you know that? You have no business to decline my request."

"Well, I guess I have about as much business as you have to make it." Then he added, "You are just the very man she wants to keep out."

"I don't think Miss Tarrant wants to keep me out," Ransom returned.

"I don't know much about her, she hasn't hired the hall. It's the other one—Miss Chancellor; it's her that runs this lecture."

"And she has asked you to keep me out? How absurd!" exclaimed Ransom ingeniously.

"She tells me you're none too fit to be round alone; you have got this thing on the brain. I guess you'd better be quiet," said the policeman.

"Quiet? Is it possible to be more quiet than I am?"

"Well, I've seen crazy folks that were a good deal like you. If you want to see the speaker why don't you go and set round in the hall, with the rest of the

public ? " And the policeman waited, in an immovable, ruminating, reasonable manner, for an answer to this inquiry.

Ransom had one, on the instant, at his service. " Because I don't want simply to see her ; I want also to speak to her—in private."

" Yes—it's always intensely private," said the policeman. " Now I wouldn't lose the lecture if I was you. I guess it will do you good."

" The lecture ? " Ransom repeated, laughing. " It won't take place."

" Yes it will—as quick as the organ stops." Then the policeman added, as to himself, " Why the devil don't it ? "

" Because Miss Tarrant has sent up to the organist to tell him to keep on."

" Who has she sent, do you s'pose ? " And Ransom's new acquaintance entered into his humour. " I guess Miss Chancellor isn't her nigger."

" She has sent her father, or perhaps even her mother. They are in there too."

" How do you know that ? " asked the policeman consideringly.

" Oh, I know everything," Ransom answered, smiling.

" Well, I guess they didn't come here to listen to that organ. We'll hear something else before long, if he doesn't stop."

" You will hear a good deal, very soon," Ransom remarked.

The serenity of his self-confidence appeared at last to make an impression on his antagonist, who lowered his head a little, like some butting animal, and looked at the young man from beneath bushy eyebrows. " Well, I *have* heard a good deal, since I've been in Boston."

" Oh, Boston's a great place," Ransom rejoined

inattentively. He was not listening to the policeman or to the organ now, for the sound of voices had reached him from the other side of the door. The policeman took no further notice of it than to lean back against the panels, with folded arms ; and there was another pause, between them, during which the playing of the organ ceased.

" I will just wait here, with your permission," said Ransom, " and presently I shall be called."

" Who do you s'pose will call you ? "

" Well, Miss Tarrant, I hope."

" She'll have to square the other one first."

Ransom took out his watch, which he had adapted, on purpose, several hours before, to Boston time, and saw that the minutes had sped with increasing velocity during this interview, and that it now marked five minutes past eight. " Miss Chancellor will have to square the public," he said in a moment ; and the words were far from being an empty profession of security, for the conviction already in possession of him, that a drama in which he, though cut off, was an actor, had been going on for some time in the apartment he was prevented from entering, that the situation was extraordinarily strained there, and that it could not come to an end without an appeal to him—this transcendental assumption acquired an infinitely greater force the instant he perceived that Verena was even now keeping her audience waiting. Why didn't she go on ? Why, except that she knew he was there, and was gaining time ?

" Well, I guess she has shown herself," said the door-keeper, whose discussion with Ransom now appeared to have passed, on his own part, and without the slightest prejudice to his firmness, into a sociable, gossiping phase.

" If she had shown herself, we should hear the reception, the applause."

" Well, there they air ; they are going to give it to her," the policeman announced.

He had an odious appearance of being in the right, for there indeed they seemed to be—they were giving it to her. A general hubbub rose from the floor and the galleries of the hall—the sound of several thousand people stamping with their feet and rapping with their umbrellas and sticks. Ransom felt faint, and for a little while he stood with his gaze interlocked with that of the policeman. Then suddenly a wave of coolness seemed to break over him, and he exclaimed : " My dear fellow, that isn't applause—it's impatience. It isn't a reception, it's a call ! "

The policeman neither assented to this proposition nor denied it ; he only transferred the protuberance in his cheek to the other side, and observed :

" I guess she's sick."

" Oh, I hope not ! " said Ransom, very gently. The stamping and rapping swelled and swelled for a minute, and then it subsided ; but before it had done so Ransom's definition of it had plainly become the true one. The tone of the manifestation was good-humoured, but it was not gratulatory. He looked at his watch again, and saw that five minutes more had elapsed, and he remembered what the newspaper-man in Charles Street had said about Olive's guaranteeing Verena's punctuality. Oddly enough, at the moment the image of this gentleman recurred to him, the gentleman himself burst through the other door, in a state of the liveliest agitation.

" Why in the name of goodness don't she go on ? If she wants to make them call her, they've done it about enough ! " Mr. Pardon turned, pressingly, from Ransom to the policeman and back again, and in his preoccupation gave no sign of having met the Mississippian before.

" I guess she's sick," said the policeman.

"The public 'll be sick!" cried the distressed reporter. "If she's sick, why doesn't she send for a doctor? All Boston is packed into this house, and she has got to talk to it. I want to go in and see."

"You can't go in," said the policeman drily.

"Why can't I go in, I should like to know? I want to go in for the *Vesper*"!

"You can't go in for anything. I'm keeping this man out, too," the policeman added genially, as if to make Mr. Pardon's exclusion appear less invidious.

"Why, they'd ought to let *you* in," said Matthias, staring a moment at Ransom.

"May be they'd ought, but they won't," the policeman remarked.

"Gracious me!" panted Mr. Pardon; "I knew from the first Miss Chancellor would make a mess of it! Where's Mr. Filer?" he went on eagerly, addressing himself apparently to either of the others, or to both.

"I guess he's at the door, counting the money," said the policeman.

"Well, he'll have to give it back if he don't look out!"

"Maybe he will. I'll let *him* in if he comes, but he's the only one. She is on now," the policeman added, without emotion.

His ear had caught the first faint murmur of another explosion of sound. This time, unmistakably, it was applause—the clapping of multitudinous hands, mingled with the noise of many throats. The demonstration, however, though considerable, was not what might have been expected, and it died away quickly. Mr. Pardon stood listening, with an expression of some alarm. "Merciful fathers! can't they give her more than that?" he cried. "I'll just fly round and see!"

When he had hurried away again, Ransom said to the policeman—" Who is Mr. Filer ? "

" Oh, he's an old friend of mine. He's the man that runs Miss Chancellor."

" That runs her ? "

" Just the same as she runs Miss Tarrant. He runs the pair, as you might say. He's in the lecture-business."

" Then he had better talk to the public himself."

" Oh, *he* can't talk ; he can only boss ! "

The opposite door at this moment was pushed open again, and a large, heated-looking man, with a little stiff beard on the end of his chin and his overcoat flying behind him, strode forward with an imprecation. " What the h—— are they doing in the parlour ? This sort of thing's about played out ! "

" Ain't she up there now ? " the policeman asked.

" It's not Miss Tarrant," Ransom said, as if he knew all about it. He perceived in a moment that this was Mr. Filer, Olive Chancellor's agent ; an inference instantly followed by the reflexion that such a personage would have been warned against him by his kinswoman and would doubtless attempt to hold him, or his influence, accountable for Verena's unexpected delay. Mr. Filer only glanced at him, however, and to Ransom's surprise appeared to have no theory of his identity ; a fact implying that Miss Chancellor had considered that the greater discretion was (except to the policeman) to hold her tongue about him altogether.

" Up there ? It's her jackass of a father that's up there ! " cried Mr. Filer, with his hand on the latch of the door, which the policeman had allowed him to approach.

" Is he asking for a doctor ? " the latter inquired dispassionately.

"You're the sort of doctor he'll want, if he doesn't produce the girl! You don't mean to say they've locked themselves in? What the plague are they after?"

"They've got the key on that side," said the policeman, while Mr. Filer discharged at the door a volley of sharp knocks, at the same time violently shaking the handle.

"If the door was locked, what was the good of your standing before it?" Ransom inquired.

"So as you couldn't do that"; and the policeman nodded at Mr. Filer.

"You see your interference has done very little good."

"I dunno; she has got to come out yet."

Mr. Filer meanwhile had continued to thump and shake, demanding instant admission and inquiring if they were going to let the audience pull the house down. Another round of applause had broken out, directed perceptibly to some apology, some solemn circumlocution, of Selah Tarrant's; this covered the sound of the agent's voice, as well as that of a confused and divided response, proceeding from the parlour. For a minute nothing definite was audible; the door remained closed, and Matthias Pardon reappeared in the vestibule.

"He says she's just a little faint—from nervousness. She'll be all ready in about three minutes." This announcement was Mr. Pardon's contribution to the crisis; and he added that the crowd was a lovely crowd, it was a real Boston crowd, it was perfectly good-humoured.

"There's a lovely crowd, and a real Boston one too, I guess, in here!" cried Mr. Filer, now banging very hard. "I've handled prima donnas, and I've handled natural curiosities, but I've never seen anything up to this. Mind what I say,

ladies ; if you don't let me in, I'll smash down the door ! "

" Don't seem as if *you* could make it much worse, does it ? " the policeman observed to Ransom, strolling aside a little, with the air of being superseded.

XLII

RANSOM made no reply; he was watching the door, which at that moment gave way from within. Verena stood there—it was she, evidently, who had opened it—and her eyes went straight to his. She was dressed in white, and her face was whiter than her garment; above it her hair seemed to shine like fire. She took a step forward; but before she could take another he had come down to her, on the threshold of the room. Her face was full of suffering, and he did not attempt—before all those eyes—to take her hand; he only said in a low tone, "I have been waiting for you—a long time!"

"I know it—I saw you in your seat—I want to speak to you."

"Well, Miss Tarrant, don't you think you'd better be on the platform?" cried Mr. Filer, making with both his arms a movement as if to sweep her before him, through the waiting-room, up into the presence of the public.

"In a moment I shall be ready. My father is making that all right." And, to Ransom's surprise, she smiled, with all her sweetness, at the irrepressible agent; appeared to wish genuinely to reassure him.

The three had moved together into the waiting-room, and there at the farther end of it, beyond the vulgar, perfunctory chairs and tables, under the flaring gas, he saw Mrs. Tarrant sitting upright on a

sofa, with immense rigidity, and a large flushed visage, full of suppressed distortion, and beside her prostrate, fallen over, her head buried in the lap of Verena's mother, the tragic figure of Olive Chancellor. Ransom could scarcely know how much Olive's having flung herself upon Mrs. Tarrant's bosom testified to the convulsive scene that had just taken place behind the locked door. He closed it again, sharply, in the face of the reporter and the policeman, and at the same moment Selah Tarrant descended, through the aperture leading to the platform, from his brief communion with the public. On seeing Ransom he stopped short, and, gathering his waterproof about him, measured the young man from head to foot.

"Well, sir, perhaps *you* would like to go and explain our hitch," he remarked, indulging in a smile so comprehensive that the corners of his mouth seemed almost to meet behind. "I presume that you, better than any one else, can give them an insight into our difficulties!"

"Father, be still; father, it will come out all right in a moment!" cried Verena, below her breath, panting like an emergent diver.

"There's one thing I want to know: are we going to spend half an hour talking over our domestic affairs?" Mr. Filer demanded, wiping his indignant countenance. "Is Miss Tarrant going to lecture, or ain't she going to lecture? If she ain't, she'll please to show cause why. Is she aware that every quarter of a second, at the present instant, is worth about five hundred dollars?"

"I know that—I know that, Mr. Filer; I will begin in a moment!" Verena went on. "I only want to speak to Mr. Ransom—just three words. They are perfectly quiet—don't you see how quiet they are? They trust me, they trust me, don't they, father? I only want to speak to Mr. Ransom."

"Who the devil is Mr. Ransom?" cried the exasperated, bewildered Filer.

Verena spoke to the others, but she looked at her lover, and the expression of her eyes was ineffably touching and beseeching. She trembled with nervous passion, there were sobs and supplications in her voice, and Ransom felt himself flushing with pure pity for her pain—her inevitable agony. But at the same moment he had another perception, which brushed aside remorse; he saw that he could do what he wanted, that she begged him, with all her being, to spare her, but that so long as he should protest she was submissive, helpless. What he wanted, in this light, flamed before him and challenged all his manhood, tossing his determination to a height from which not only Doctor Tarrant, and Mr. Filer, and Olive, over there, in her sightless, soundless shame, but the great expectant hall as well, and the mighty multitude, in suspense, keeping quiet from minute to minute and holding the breath of its anger—from which all these things looked small, surmountable, and of the moment only. He didn't quite understand, as yet, however; he saw that Verena had not refused, but temporised, that the spell upon her—thanks to which he should still be able to rescue her—had been the knowledge that he was near.

"Come away, come away," he murmured quickly, putting out his two hands to her.

She took one of them, as if to plead, not to consent. "Oh, let me off, let me off—for *her*, for the others! It's too terrible, it's impossible!"

"What I want to know is why Mr. Ransom isn't in the hands of the police!" wailed Mrs. Tarrant, from her sofa.

"I have been, madam, for the last quarter of an hour." Ransom felt more and more that he could manage it, if he only kept cool. He bent over Verena

with a tenderness in which he was careless, now, of observation. "Dearest, I told you, I warned you. I left you alone for ten weeks; but could that make you doubt it was coming? Not for worlds, not for millions, shall you give yourself to that roaring crowd. Don't ask me to care for them, or for any one! What do they care for you but to gape and grin and babble? You are mine, you are not theirs."

"What under the sun is the man talking about? With the most magnificent audience ever brought together! The city of Boston is under this roof!" Mr. Filer gaspingly interposed.

"The city of Boston be damned!" said Ransom.

"Mr. Ransom is very much interested in my daughter. He doesn't approve of our views," Selah Tarrant explained.

"It's the most horrible, wicked, immoral selfishness I ever heard in my life!" roared Mrs. Tarrant.

"Selfishness! Mrs. Tarrant, do you suppose I pretend not to be selfish?"

"Do you want us all murdered by the mob, then?"

"They can have their money—can't you give them back their money?" cried Verena, turning frantically round the circle.

"Verena Tarrant, you don't mean to say you are going to back down?" her mother shrieked.

"Good God! that I should make her suffer like this!" said Ransom to himself; and to put an end to the odious scene he would have seized Verena in his arms and broken away into the outer world, if Olive, who at Mrs. Tarrant's last loud challenge had sprung to her feet, had not at the same time thrown herself between them with a force which made the girl relinquish her grasp of Ransom's hand. To his astonishment, the eyes that looked at him out of her scared, haggard face were, like Verena's, eyes of tremendous entreaty. There was a moment during

which she would have been ready to go down on her knees to him, in order that the lecture should go on.

"If you don't agree with her, take her up on the platform, and have it out there; the public would like that, first-rate!" Mr. Filer said to Ransom, as if he thought this suggestion practical.

"She had prepared a lovely address!" Selah remarked mournfully, as if to the company in general.

No one appeared to heed the observation, but his wife broke out again. "Verena Tarrant, I should like to slap you! Do you call such a man as that a gentleman? I don't know where your father's spirit is, to let him stay!"

Olive, meanwhile, was literally praying to her kinsman. "Let her appear this once, just this once: not to ruin, not to shame! Haven't you any pity; do you want me to be hooted? It's only for an hour. Haven't you any soul?"

Her face and voice were terrible to Ransom; she had flung herself upon Verena and was holding her close, and he could see that her friend's suffering was faint in comparison to her own. "Why for an hour, when it's all false and damnable? An hour is as bad as ten years! She's mine or she isn't, and if she's mine, she's all mine!"

"Yours! Yours! Verena, think, think what you're doing!" Olive moaned, bending over her.

Mr. Filer was now pouring forth his nature in objurgations and oaths, and brandishing before the culprits—Verena and Ransom—the extreme penalty of the law. Mrs. Tarrant had burst into violent hysterics, while Selah revolved vaguely about the room and declared that it seemed as if the better day was going to be put off for quite a while. "Don't you see how good, how sweet they are—giving us all

this time? Don't you think that when they behave like that—without a sound, for five minutes—they ought to be rewarded?" Verena asked, smiling divinely, at Ransom. Nothing could have been more tender, more exquisite, than the way she put her appeal upon the ground of simple charity, kindness to the great good-natured, childish public.

"Miss Chancellor may reward them in any way she likes. Give them back their money and a little present to each."

"Money and presents? I should like to shoot you, sir!" yelled Mr. Filer. The audience had really been very patient, and up to this point deserved Verena's praise; but it was now long past eight o'clock, and symptoms of irritation—cries and groans and hisses—began again to proceed from the hall. Mr. Filer launched himself into the passage leading to the stage, and Selah rushed after him. Mrs. Tarrant extended herself, sobbing, on the sofa, and Olive, quivering in the storm, inquired of Ransom what he wanted her to do, what humiliation, what degradation, what sacrifice he imposed.

"I'll do anything—I'll be abject—I'll be vile—I'll go down in the dust!"

"I ask nothing of you, and I have nothing to do with you," Ransom said. "That is, I ask, at the most, that you shouldn't expect that, wishing to make Verena my wife, I should say to her, 'Oh yes, you can take an hour or two out of it!' Verena," he went on, "all this is out of it—dreadfully, odiously—and it's a great deal too much! Come, come as far away from here as possible, and we'll settle the rest!"

The combined effort of Mr. Filer and Selah Tarrant to pacify the public had not, apparently, the success it deserved; the house continued in uproar and the volume of sound increased. "Leave us alone, leave

us alone for a single minute!" cried Verena; "just let me speak to him, and it will be all right!" She rushed over to her mother, drew her, dragged her from the sofa, led her to the door of the room. Mrs. Tarrant, on the way, reunited herself with Olive (the horror of the situation had at least that compensation for her), and, clinging and staggering together, the distracted women, pushed by Verena, passed into the vestibule, now, as Ransom saw, deserted by the policeman and the reporter, who had rushed round to where the battle was thickest.

"Oh, why did you come—why, why?" And Verena, turning back, threw herself upon him with a protest which was all, and more than all, a surrender. She had never yet given herself to him so much as in that movement of reproach.

"Didn't you expect me, and weren't you sure?" he asked, smiling at her and standing there till she arrived.

"I didn't know—it was terrible—it's awful! I saw you in your place, in the house, when you came. As soon as we got here I went out to those steps that go up to the stage and I looked out, with my father—from behind him—and saw you in a minute. Then I felt too nervous to speak! I could never, never, if you were there! My father didn't know you, and I said nothing, but Olive guessed as soon as I came back. She rushed at me, and she looked at me—oh, how she looked! and she guessed. She didn't need to go out to see for herself, and when she saw how I was trembling she began to tremble herself, to believe, as I believed, we were lost. Listen to them, listen to them, in the house! Now I want you to go away—I will see you to-morrow, as long as you wish. That's all I want now; if you will only go away it's not too late, and everything will be all right!"

Preoccupied as Ransom was with the simple

purpose of getting her bodily out of the place, he could yet notice her strange, touching tone, and her air of believing that she might really persuade him. She had evidently given up everything now—every pretence of a different conviction and of loyalty to her cause ; all this had fallen from her as soon as she felt him near, and she asked him to go away just as any plighted maiden might have asked any favour of her lover. But it was the poor girl's misfortune that whatever she did or said, or left unsaid, only had the effect of making her dearer to him and making the people who were clamouring for her seem more and more a raving rabble.

He indulged not in the smallest recognition of her request, and simply said, " Surely Olive must have believed, must have known, I would come."

" She would have been sure if you hadn't become so unexpectedly quiet after I left Marmion. You seemed to concur, to be willing to wait."

" So I was, for a few weeks. But they ended yesterday. I was furious that morning, when I learned your flight, and during the week that followed I made two or three attempts to find you. Then I stopped—I thought it better. I saw you were very well hidden ; I determined not even to write. I felt I *could* wait—with that last day at Marmion to think of. Besides, to leave you with her awhile, for the last, seemed more decent. Perhaps you'll tell me now where you were."

" I was with father and mother. She sent me to them that morning, with a letter. I don't know what was in it. Perhaps there was money," said Verena, who evidently now would tell him everything.

" And where did they take you ? "

" I don't know—to places. I was in Boston once, for a day ; but only in a carriage. They were as frightened as Olive ; they were bound to save me ! "

"They shouldn't have brought you here to-night then. How could you possibly doubt of my coming?"

"I don't know what I thought, and I didn't know, till I saw you, that all the strength I had hoped for would leave me in a flash, and that if I attempted to speak—with you sitting there—I should make the most shameful failure. We had a sickening scene here—I begged for delay, for time to recover. We waited and waited, and when I heard you at the door talking to the policeman, it seemed to me everything was gone. But it will still come back, if you will leave me. They are quiet again—father must be interesting them."

"I hope he is!" Ransom exclaimed. "If Miss Chancellor ordered the policeman, she must have expected me."

"That was only after she knew you were in the house. She flew out into the lobby with father, and they seized him and posted him there. She locked the door; she seemed to think they would break it down. I didn't wait for that, but from the moment I knew you were on the other side of it I couldn't go on—I was paralysed. It has made me feel better to talk to you—and now I could appear," Verena added.

"My darling child, haven't you a shawl or a mantle?" Ransom returned, for all answer, looking about him. He perceived, tossed upon a chair, a long, furred cloak, which he caught up and, before she could resist, threw over her. She even let him arrange it, and, standing there, draped from head to foot in it, contented herself with saying, after a moment:

"I don't understand—where shall we go? Where will you take me?"

"We shall catch the night-train for New York, and the first thing in the morning we shall be married."

Verena remained gazing at him, with swimming

eyes. "And what will the people do? Listen, listen!"

"Your father is ceasing to interest them. They'll howl and thump, according to their nature."

"Ah, their nature's fine!" Verena pleaded.

"Dearest, that's one of the fallacies I shall have to woo you from. Hear them, the senseless brutes!" The storm was now raging in the hall, and it deepened to such a point that Verena turned to him in a supreme appeal.

"I could soothe them with a word!"

"Keep your soothing words for me—you will have need of them all, in our coming time," Ransom said, laughing. He pulled open the door again, which led into the lobby, but he was driven back, with Verena, by a furious onset from Mrs. Tarrant. Seeing her daughter fairly arrayed for departure, she hurled herself upon her, half in indignation, half in a blind impulse to cling, and with an outpouring of tears, reproaches, prayers, strange scraps of argument and iterations of farewell, closed her about with an embrace which was partly a supreme caress, partly the salutary castigation she had, three minutes before, expressed the wish to administer, and altogether for the moment a check upon the girl's flight.

"Mother, dearest, it's all for the best, I can't help it, I love you just the same; let me go, let me go!" Verena stammered, kissing her again, struggling to free herself, and holding out her hand to Ransom. He saw now that she only wanted to get away, to leave everything behind her. Olive was close at hand, on the threshold of the room, and as soon as Ransom looked at her he became aware that the weakness she had just shown had passed away. She had straightened herself again, and she was upright in her desolation. The expression of her face was a thing to remain with him for ever; it was impossible

to imagine a more vivid presentment of blighted hope and wounded pride. Dry, desperate, rigid, she yet wavered and seemed uncertain; her pale, glittering eyes straining forward, as if they were looking for death. Ransom had a vision, even at that crowded moment, that if she could have met it there and then, bristling with steel or lurid with fire, she would have rushed on it without a tremor, like the heroine that she was. All this while the great agitation in the hall rose and fell, in waves and surges, as if Selah Tarrant and the agent were talking to the multitude, trying to calm them, succeeding for the moment, and then letting them loose again. Whirled down by one of the fitful gusts, a lady and a gentleman issued from the passage, and Ransom, glancing at them, recognised Mrs. Farrinder and her husband.

"Well, Miss Chancellor," said that more successful woman, with considerable asperity, "if this is the way you're going to reinstate our sex!" She passed rapidly through the room, followed by Amariah, who remarked in his transit that it seemed as if there had been a want of organisation, and the two retreated expeditiously, without the lady's having taken the smallest notice of Verena, whose conflict with her mother prolonged itself. Ransom, striving, with all needful consideration for Mrs. Tarrant, to separate these two, addressed not a word to Olive; it was the last of her, for him, and he neither saw how her livid face suddenly glowed, as if Mrs. Farrinder's words had been a lash, nor how, as if with a sudden inspiration, she rushed to the approach to the platform. If he had observed her, it might have seemed to him that she hoped to find the fierce expiation she sought for in exposure to the thousands she had disappointed and deceived, in offering herself to be trampled to death and torn to pieces. She might have suggested to him some feminine firebrand of Paris revolutions, erect on

a barricade, or even the sacrificial figure of Hypatia, whirled through the furious mob of Alexandria. She was arrested an instant by the arrival of Mrs. Burrage and her son, who had quitted the stage on observing the withdrawal of the Farrinders, and who swept into the room in the manner of people seeking shelter from a thunderstorm. The mother's face expressed the well-bred surprise of a person who should have been asked out to dinner and seen the cloth pulled off the table; the young man, who supported her on his arm, instantly lost himself in the spectacle of Verena disengaging herself from Mrs. Tarrant, only to be again overwhelmed, and in the unexpected presence of the Mississippian. His handsome blue eyes turned from one to the other, and he looked infinitely annoyed and bewildered. It even seemed to occur to him that he might, perhaps, interpose with effect, and he evidently would have liked to say that, without really bragging, *he* would at least have kept the affair from turning into a row. But Verena, muffled and escaping, was deaf to him, and Ransom didn't look the right person to address such a remark as that to. Mrs. Burrage and Olive, as the latter shot past, exchanged a glance which represented quick irony on one side and indiscriminating defiance on the other.

"Oh, are *you* going to speak?" the lady from New York inquired, with her cursory laugh.

Olive had already disappeared; but Ransom heard her answer flung behind her into the room. "I am going to be hissed and hooted and insulted!"

"Olive, Olive!" Verena suddenly shrieked; and her piercing cry might have reached the front. But Ransom had already, by muscular force, wrenched her away, and was hurrying her out, leaving Mrs. Tarrant to heave herself into the arms of Mrs. Burrage, who, he was sure, would, within a minute, loom upon

her attractively through her tears, and supply her with a reminiscence, destined to be valuable, of aristocratic support and clever composure. In the outer labyrinth hasty groups, a little scared, were leaving the hall, giving up the game. Ransom, as he went, thrust the hood of Verena's long cloak over her head, to conceal her face and her identity. It quite prevented recognition, and as they mingled in the issuing crowd he perceived the quick, complete, tremendous silence which, in the hall, had greeted Olive Chancellor's rush to the front. Every sound instantly dropped, the hush was respectful, the great public waited, and whatever she should say to them (and he thought she might indeed be rather embarrassed) it was not apparent that they were likely to hurl the benches at her. Ransom, palpitating with his victory, felt now a little sorry for her, and was relieved to know that, even when exasperated, a Boston audience is not ungenerous. "Ah, now I am glad!" said Verena, when they reached the street. But though she was glad, he presently discovered that, beneath her hood, she was in tears. It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last she was destined to shed.

THE END

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